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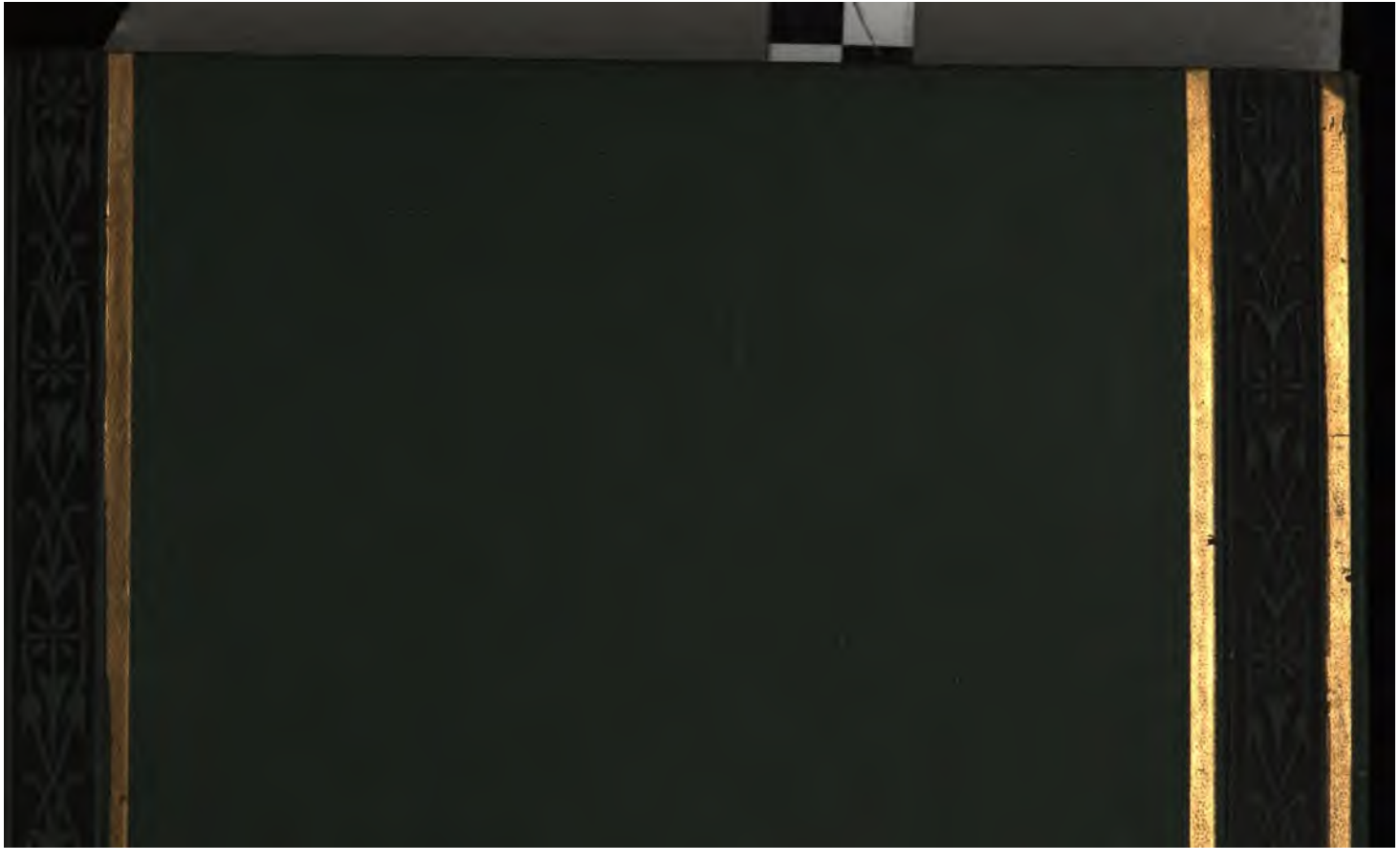

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MY YOUNG ALCIDES.

MY YOUNG

MY YOUNG ALCIDES

A FADED PHOTOGRAPH

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE" &c.

YOUNG HERCULES.—*From a Gem*

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

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PREFACE.

IDEAS have a tyrannous power of insisting on being worked out, even when one fears they may be leading in a track already worthily pre-occupied.

But the Hercules myth did not seem to me to be like one of the fairy tales that we have seen so gracefully and quaintly modernised; and at the risk of seeming to travestie the Farnese statue in a shooting-coat and wide-awake, I could not help going on, as the notion grew deeper and more engrossing.

For, whether the origin of the myth be, or be not, founded on solar phenomena, the yearning Greek mind formed on it an unconscious allegory of the course of the Victor, of whom the Sun, rejoicing as a giant to run his course, is another type, like Samson of old, since the facts of nature and of history are Divine parables.

And as each one's conquest is, in the track of his Leader, the only true Conqueror, so Hercules, in spite of all the grotesque adjuncts that the lower inventions of the heathen hung round him, is a far closer likeness of manhood—as, indeed, the proverbial use of some of his tasks testifies—and of repentant man conquering himself. The great crime,

after which his life was a bondage of expiation; the choice between Virtue and Vice; the slain passion; the hundred-headed sin for ever cropping up again; the winning of the sacred emblem of purity;—then the subduing of greed; the cleansing of long-negleted uncleanness; the silencing of foul tongues; the remarkable contest with the creature which had become a foe, because, after being devoted for sacrifice, it was spared; the obtaining the girdle of strength; the recovery of the spoil from the three-fold enemy; the gaining of the fruit of life; immediately followed by the victory over the hell-hound of death; and lastly, the attainment of immortality—all seem no fortuitous imagination, but one of those when "thoughts beyond their thoughts to those old bards were given."

I have not followed all these meanings, for this is not an allegory, but a mere distant following rather of the spirit than the letter of the old Greek tale of the Twelve Tasks. Neither have I adhered to every incident of Hercules' life; and the most touching and beautiful of all—the rescue of Alcestis, would hardly bear to come in merely as an episode, in this weak and presumptuous endeavour to show that the half-divine, patient conqueror is not merely a classic invention, but that he and his labours belong in some form or other to all times and all surroundings.

C. M. YONGE.

Nov. 8, 1875.

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MY YOUNG ALCIDES:

A FADED PHOTOGRAPH.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARGHOUSE INHERITANCE.

ONE of the children brought me a photograph album, long ago finished and closed, and showed me a faded and blurred figure over which there had been a little dispute. Was it Hercules with club and lion-skin, or was it a gentleman I had known?

Ah me! how soon a man's place knoweth him no more! What fresh recollections that majestic form awoke in me—the massive features, with the steadfast eye, and low, square brow, curled over with

short rings of hair; the mouth, that, through the thick, short beard, still invited trust and reliance, even while there was a look of fire and determination that inspired dread.

The thing seemed to us hideous and absurd when it was taken by Miss Horsman. I hated it, and hid it away as a caricature. But now those pale, vanishing tints bring the very presence before me; and before the remembrance can become equally obscure in my own mind, let me record for others the years that I spent with my young Alcides as he now stands before me in memory.

Our family history is a strange one. I, Lucy Alison, never even saw my twin brothers—nor, indeed, knew of their existence—during my childhood. I had one brother a year younger than myself, and as long as he lived he was treated as the eldest son, and neither he nor I ever dreamed that my father had had a first wife and two sons. He was a feeble, broken man, who seemed to my young fancy so old that in after times it was always a shock to me to read on his tablet,

"Percy Alison, aged fifty-seven;" and I was but seven years old when he died under the final blow of the loss of my little brother Percy from measles.

The dear old place—a house with five gables on the garden front, black timbered, and with white plaster between, and oh! such flowers in the garden—was left to my mother for her life; and she was a great deal younger than my father, so we went on living there, and it was only when I was almost a woman that I came to the knowledge that the property would never be mine, but would go in the male line to the son of one of my disinherited convict brothers.

The story, as my mother knew it, was this: Their names were Ambrose and Eustace; there was very little interval between their births, and there had been some confusion between them during the first few hours of their lives, so that the question of seniority was never entirely clear, though Ambrose was so completely the leader and master that he was always looked upon as the elder.

In their early youth they were led away by a man of Polish extraction, though a British subject, one Count Prometesky, who had thrown himself into every revolutionary movement on the Continent, had fought under Kosciusko in Poland, joined the Carbonari in Italy, and at last escaped, with health damaged by a wound, to teach languages and military drawing in England, and, unhappily, to spread his principles among his pupils, during the excitement connected with the Reform Bill. Under his teaching my poor brothers became such democrats that they actually married the two daughters of a man from Cumberland named Lewthwayte, whom Lord Erymanth had turned out of one of his farms for his insolence and radicalism; and not long after they were engaged in the agricultural riots, drilling the peasants, making inflammatory speeches, and doing all they could to bring on a revolution. Dreadful harm was done on the Erymanth estate, and the farm from which Lewthwayte had been expelled suffered especially, the whole of the ricks and

buildings being burnt down, though the family of the occupant was saved, partly by Prometesky's exertions.

When the troops came, both he and my brothers were taken with arms in their hands; they were tried by the special commission and sentenced to death. Lewthwayte and his son were actually hung; but there was great interest made for Ambrose and Eustace, and in consideration of their early youth (they were not twenty-two) their sentence was commuted to transportation for life, and so was Prometesky's, because he was half a foreigner, and because he was proved to have saved life.

My father would not see them again, but he offered their wives a passage out to join them, and wanted to have had their two babies left with him, but the two young women refused to part with them; and it was after that that he married again, meaning to cast them off for ever, though, as long as their time of servitude lasted, he sent the wives an allowance, and as soon as his sons could hold property, he gave them a

handsome sum with which to set themselves up in a large farm in the Bush.

And when little Percy died, he wanted again to have his eldest grandson sent home to him, and was very much wounded by the refusal which came only just before his death. His will had left the estate to the grandson, as the right heir. Everyone looked on it as a bad prospect, but no one thought of the "convict boy" as in the immediate future, as my mother was still quite a young woman.

But when I was just three-and-twenty, an attack of diphtheria broke out; my mother and I both caught it; and, alas! I alone recovered. The illness was very long with me, partly from my desolateness and grief, for, tender as my kind old servants were, and good as were my friends and neighbours, they could only make me feel what they were *not*.

Our old lawyer, Mr. Prosser, had written to my nephew, for we knew that both the poor brothers were dead; but he assured me that I might safely stay on at the old place, for it

would be eight months before his letter could be answered, and the heir could not come for a long time after.

I was very glad to linger on, for I clung to the home, and looked at every bush and flower, blossoming for the last time, almost as if I were dying, and leaving them to a sort of fiend. My mother's old friends, Lady Diana Tracy and Lord Erymanth, her brother, used to bemoan with me the coming of this lad, born of a plebeian mother, bred up in a penal colony, and, no doubt, uneducated except in its coarsest vices. Lord Erymanth told at endless length all the advice he had given my father in vain, and bewailed the sense of justice that had bequeathed the property to such a male heir as could not fail to be a scourge to the country. Everyone had some story to tell of Ambrose's fiery speeches and insubordinate actions, viewing Eustace as not so bad because his mere satellite—and what must not their sons be?

The only person who had any feeling of pity or affection for them was old Miss Woolmer.

She was the daughter of a former clergyman of Mycening, the little town which is almost at our park-gates. She was always confined to the house by rheumatic-gout. She had grown up with my brothers. I sometimes wondered if she had not had a little tenderness for one of them, but I believe it was almost elder-sisterly. She told me much in their excuse. My father had never been the fond, indulgent father to them that I remembered him, but a strict, stern authority when he was at home, and when he was absent leaving them far too much to their own devices; while Prometesky was a very attractive person, brilliant, accomplished, full of fire and of faith in his theories of universal benevolence and emancipation.

She thought, if the times had not been such as to bring them into action, Ambrose would have outgrown and modified all that was dangerous in his theories, and that they would have remained mere talk, the ebullition of his form of knight-errantry; for it was generous indignation and ardour that chiefly led him astray, and Eustace

was always his double: but there were some incidents at the time which roused him to fury. Lewthwayte was a Cumberland man, who had inherited the stock and the last years of a lease of a farm on Lord Erymanth's property; he had done a good deal for it, and expended money on the understanding that he should have the lease renewed, but he was a man of bold, independent northern tongue, and gave great offence to his lordship, who was used to be listened to with a sort of feudal deference. He was of the fierce old Norse blood, and his daughters were tall, fair, magnificent young women, not at all uneducated nor vulgar, and it was the finding that my brothers were becoming intimate at his farm that made Lord Erymanth refuse to renew the lease and turn the family out so harshly, and with as little notice as possible.

The cruelty, as they thought it, was, Miss Woolmer said, most ill-judged, and precipitated the very thing that was dreaded. The youths rushed into the marriage with the daughters, and cast in their lot with all that could overturn the

existing order of things, but Miss Woolmer did not believe they had had anything to do with the rick-burning or machine-breaking. All that was taken out of their hands by more brutal, ignorant demagogues. They were mere visionaries and enthusiasts according to her, and she said the two wives were very noble-looking, high-spirited young women. She had gone to see them several times when their husbands were in prison, and had been much struck with Alice, Ambrose's wife, who held up most bravely; though Dorothy, poor thing, was prostrated, and indeed her child was born in the height of the distress, when his father had just been tried for his life, and sentenced to death.

It was their birth and education that caused them to be treated so severely; besides, there was no doubt of their having harangued the people, and stirred them up, and they were seen, as well as Prometesky, at the fire at what had been Lewthwayte's farm; at least, so it was declared by men who turned King's evidence, and the proof to the contrary broke down, because it depended

on the wives, whose evidence was not admissible; indeed that—as the law then stood—was not the question. Those who had raised the storm were responsible for all that was done in it, and it was very barely that their lives were spared.

That was the comfort Miss Woolmer gave. No one else could see any at all, except a few old women in the parish, who spoke tenderly of poor Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Eustace; but then they had sons or brothers who had been out with the rioters, and after these twenty-six years no one remembered the outrages and terrors of the time with anything but horror; and the coming of the wild lad from the Bush was looked on as the end of all comfort.

I meant, as soon as I heard he was on the way, to leave Arghouse, make visits among friends, and decide on my future home, for, alas! there was no one who wanted me. I was quite alone in the world; my mother's cousins were not near, and I hardly knew them; and my only relations were the bushrangers, as Lady Diana Tracy called them.

She was sister to Lord Erymanth, and widow to an Irish gentleman, and had settled in the next parish to us, with her children, on the death of her husband.

Her little daughter, Viola, had been spending the day with me, and it was a lovely spring evening, when we sat on the lawn, wondering whether I should ever care for anything so much as for those long shadows from the fir woods upon the sloping field, with the long grass rippling in the wind, and the border of primroses round the edge of the wood.

We heard wheels and thought it was the carriage come for Viola, much too soon, when out ran one of the maids, crying, "Oh! Miss Alison, he is come. There's ever so many of them!"

I believe we caught hold of one another in our fright, and were almost surprised when, outstripping lame old Richardson, as he announced "Mr. Alison!" there came only three persons. They were the two tallest men I had ever seen, and a little girl of eight years old. I found my hand in a very large one, and with the words

"Are you my aunt Lucy?" I was, as it were, gathered up and kissed. The voice, somehow, carried a comfortable feeling in the kindness of its power and depth; and though it was a mouth bristly with yellow bristles, such as had never touched me before, the honest friendly eyes gave me an indescribable feeling of belonging to somebody, and of having ceased to be alone in the world.

"Here is Eustace," he said, "and little Dora," putting the child forward as she backed against him, most unwilling to let me kiss her. "And, I did not know I had another aunt."

"No," I said, starting between, for what would Lady Diana's feelings have been if Viola had carried home an Australian kiss? "This is Miss Tracy."

Viola's carriage was now actually coming, and as I went into the house with her, she held me, whispering to me to come home at once with her, but I told her I could not leave them in that way and they were really my nephews.

"You are not afraid?" she said.

"What do you think he could do to me?" I asked, laughing.

"He is so big," said Viola. "I never saw any one so big, but I think he is like Cœur de Lion. Ah!" We both shrieked, for a most uncanny monster was rearing up in front of us, hopping about the hall, as far as was allowed by the chain that fastened it to the leg of a table.

"Mr. Alison brought it, ma'am," said Richardson, in a tone of disgust and horror. "Will you have the carriage out, Miss Alison, and go down to the Wyvern? Shuh! you brute! He shan't hurt you, my dear ladies. I'll stand between."

We had recovered our senses, however, enough to see that it was only a harmless kangaroo; and Dora came running out, followed by Harold, caressing the beast, calling it poor Nanny, and asking where he should shut it up for the night.

I suggested an outhouse, and we conducted the creature thither in procession, hearing by the way that the kangaroo's mother had been shot, and that the animal itself, then very young,

and no bigger than a cat, had taken Harold's open shirt front for her pouch and leaped into his bosom, and that it had been brought up to its present stature tame at Boola Boola. Viola went with us, fed the kangaroo, and was so much interested and delighted, that she could hardly go away, Eustace making her a most elaborate and rather absurd bow, being evidently much impressed by the carriage and liveried servants who were waiting for her.

"Like the Governor's lady!" he said. "And I know, for I've been to a ball at Government House."

He plainly cared much more for appearances than did Harold. He was not so tall, much slighter, with darker hair, rather too shiny, and a neatly turned up moustache, a gorgeous tie and watch chain, a brilliant breast pin, a more brilliant ring, and a general air that made me conclude that he regarded himself as a Sydney beau. But Harold, in his loose, rough grey suit, was very different. His height was extraordinary, his breadth of chest and shoulder equally gigantic,

though well proportioned, and with a look of easy strength, and, as Viola had said, his head was very much what one knows as the Lion Heart's, not Marochetti's trim carpet knight, but Vertue's rugged portrait from the monument at Fontévraud. There was the same massive breadth of feature, large yet not heavy, being relieved by the exceeding keenness and quickness of the light but very blue eyes, which seemed to see everywhere round in a moment, as men do in wild countries. The short thick yellow curly beard and moustache veiled the lower part of the face; but the general expression, when still, was decidedly a sad one, though a word or a trick of Dora's would call up a smile all over the browned cheeks and bright eyes. His form and colouring must have come from the Cumberland statesman, but people said his voice and expression had much of his father in them; and no one could think him ungentlemanly, though he was not like any English gentleman. He wore no gaieties like Eustace, the handkerchief loosely knotted round his neck sailor

fashion was plain black, and he had a gold ring on his little finger.

Dora had the same yellow curly hair, in tight, frizzly rings all over her head, like a boy's, a light complexion, and blue eyes, in a round, pug-nosed face; and she hung so entirely on Harold that I never doubted that she was his sister till, as we were sitting down to eat, I said, "Can't you come a little way from your brother?"

Eustace gave his odd little giggle, and said, "There, Dora!"

"I'm not his sister—I'm his wife!"

"There!" and Eustace giggled again and ordered her away; but I saw Harold's brow knit with pain, and as she began to reiterate her assertion and resist Eustace, he gently sat her down on the chair near at hand, and silently made her understand that she was to stay there; but Eustace rather teasingly said:

"Aunt Lucy will teach you manners, Dora. She is my sister, and we have brought her home to send her to school."

"I won't go to school," said Dora; "Harold would not."

"You won't get away like him," returned Eustace, in the same tone.

"Yes, I shall. I'll lick all the girls," she returned, clenching a pair of red mottled fists that looked very capable.

"For shame, Dora!" said the low voice.

"Harold did," said she, looking up at me triumphantly; "he beat all the boys, and had to come back again to Boola Boola."

I longed to understand more, but I was ashamed to betray my ignorance of my near relations, for I did not even know whether their mothers were alive; but I saw that if I only listened, Eustace would soon tell everything. He had a runaway chin, and his mouth had a look at times that made me doubt whether there were not some slight want in his intellect, or at least weakness of character. However, I was relieved from the fear of the vice with which the neighbourhood had threatened us, for neither of them would touch wine

or beer, but begged for tea, and drank oceans of it.

We had not long finished, when Richardson brought me a note from Lady Diana Tracy, saying she had sent the carriage for me that I might at once take refuge from this unforeseen invasion.

I felt it out of all possibility that I should thus run away, and yet I knew I owed an apology for Harold's finding me and the old servants in possession, so I began to say that my old friend had sent the carriage for me.—I had been taken by surprise, their journey (one of the first across the Isthmus) had been so much quicker than I had expected, or I should have left the house free for them.

"Why?" asked Harold. And when I answered that the place was his and I had no business there, he did not seem to see it. "It is your home," he said; "you have always lived here."

I began explaining that this was no reason at all; but he would not hear of my going away, and declared that it was I who belonged to

the place, so that I confessed that I should be very thankful to stay a little while.

"Not only a little while," he said; "it is your home as much as ever, and the best thing in the world for us."

"Yes, yes," responded Eustace; "we kept on wondering what Aunt Lucy would be like, and never thought she could be such a nice *young* lady."

"Not realising that your aunt is younger than yourselves," I said.

"No," said Eustace, "the old folk never would talk of home—my father did not like it, you see—and Aunt Alice had moved off to New Zealand, so that we could not go and talk about it to her. Mr. Smith has got a school in Auckland, you know."

I did not know, but I found that a year or two after the death of my brother Ambrose, his widow had become the second wife of the master of a boarding-school at Sydney, and that it was there that Harold, at ten years old, had fought all the boys, including the step-children, and had

been so audacious and uncontrollable, that she had been forced to return him to his uncle and aunt in the "Bush." Eustace had been with the Smiths at Sydney until her move to Auckland, he had even been presented, and had been to a ball at Government House, and thus was viewed as the polished member of the family, though, if he had come as master, I should never have been drawn, as I was by Harold's free, kindly simplicity, into writing my thanks to Lady Diana, and saying that I could not leave my nephews so abruptly, especially as they had brought a little sister.

It was gratifying to see that Harold was uneasy till the note was sent off and the carriage dismissed. "You are not going?" he said, as persuasively as if he were speaking to Dora, and I strove to make a wise and prudent answer, about remaining for the next few days, and settling the rest when he had made his plans.

Then I proposed to take Dora up to bed, but though manifestly very weary, the child refused, and when her brother tried to order her, she ran

between Harold's knees, and there tossed her head and glared at me. He lifted her on his lap, and she drew his arm round her in defence. Eustace said he spoilt her, but he still held her, and, as she dropped asleep against his breast, Eustace related, almost in a tone of complaint, that she had cared for no one else ever since the time she had been lost in the Bush, and Harold had found her, after three days, in the last stage of exhaustion, since which time she had had neither eyes, ears, nor allegiance for any other creature, but that she must be taught something, and made into a lady.

Harold gazed down on her with his strange, soft, melancholy smile, somehow seeming to vex Eustace, who accused him of not caring how rough and uncultivated she was, nor himself either.

"We leave the polish to you," said Harold.

"Why, yes," said Eustace, simpering, "my uncle Smith gave me the first advantages in Sydney, and everyone knew my father was 'a gentleman.'"

Harold bit the hair that hung over his lip, and I guessed, what I afterwards found to be the truth, that his stepfather was no small trial to him; being, in fact, an unprosperous tutor and hanger-on on some nobleman's family, finally sent out by his patrons in despair, to keep school in Sydney.

Poor Ambrose had died of lock-jaw from a cut from an axe very soon after his emancipation, just as his energy was getting the farm into order, and making things look well with the family, and, after a year or two, Alice, deceived by the man's air and manners, and hoping to secure education for her son, had married, and the effect had been that, while Harold was provoked into fierce insubordination, Eustace became imbued with a tuft-hunting spirit, a great contrast to what might have been expected from his antecedents.

I cannot tell whether I found this out the first evening, or only gradually discovered it, with much besides. I only remember that when at last Harold carried Dora upstairs fast asleep, and my

maid Colman and I had undressed her and put her into a little bed in a room opening out of mine, I went to rest, feeling rejoiced that the suspense was over and I knew the worst. I felt rather as if I had a magnificent wild beast in the house; and yet there was a wonderful attraction, partly from the drawing of kindred blood, and partly from the strength and sweetness of Harold's own face, and, aunt like, I could not help feeling proud of having such a grand creature belonging to me, though there might be a little dread of what he would do next.

In the morning all seemed like a dream, for Dora had vanished, leaving no trace but her black bag; but while I was dressing a tremendous cackling among my bantams caused me to look out, when I beheld them scurrying right and left at sight of the kangaroo leaping after the three strangers, and my cat on the top of the garden wall on tiptoe, with arched back, bristling tail, and glassy eyes, viewing the beast as the vengeful apotheosis of all the rats and mice she had slaughtered in her time.

From the stairs I heard Dora scouting her brother's orders to tidy herself for breakfast, adding that Harry never did, to which he merely replied, "I shall now. Come."

There was a sound of hoisting, that gave me warning rather fortunately, for he came striding upstairs with that great well-grown girl of eight perched on his shoulder as if she had been a baby, and would have run me down if I had not avoided into the nook on the landing.

All that day and the next those three were out; I never saw them but at meals, when they came in full of eager questions and comments on their discoveries in farming and other matters. These were the early bright days of spring, and they were out till after dark, only returning to eat and go to bed. I found the fascination of Harold's presence was on all the servants and dependents, except perhaps our bailiff Bullock who disliked him from the first. All the others declared that they had no doubt about staying on, now that they saw what the young squire really was. It made a great impression on them

that, when in some farmyard arrangements there was a moment's danger of a faggot pile falling, he put his shoulder against it and propped the whole weight without effort. His manhood, strength, and knowledge of work delighted them, and they declared already that he would be a good friend to the poor.

I confess that here lay what alarmed me. He was always given to few words, but I could see that he was shocked at the contrast between our poor and the Australian settlers, where food and space were plenty and the wages high. I was somewhat hurt at his way of viewing what had always seemed to me perfection, at least all that could be reasonably expected for the poor—our pet school, our old women, our civil dependents in tidy cottages, our picturesque lodges; and I did not half like his trenchant questions, which seemed to imply censure on all that I had hitherto thought unquestionable, and perhaps I told him somewhat impatiently that, when he had been a little longer here, he would understand our ways and fall naturally into them.

"That's just what I don't want," he said.

"Not want?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; I want to see clearly before I get used to things."

And as, perhaps, I seemed to wonder at this way of beginning, he opened a little, and said, "It is my father. He told me that if ever I came here I was to mind and do his work."

"What kind of work?" I asked, anxiously.

"Doing what he meant to have done," returned Harold, "for the poor. He said I should find out about it."

"You must have been too young to understand much of what he meant then," I said. "Did he not regret anything?"

"Yes, he said he had begun at the wrong end, when they were not ripe for it, and that the failure had ruined him for trying again."

"Then he did see things differently at last?" I said, hoping to find that the sentiments I had always heard condemned had not been perpetuated.

"Oh yes!" cried Eustace. "They were just

brutes, you know, that nobody could do any good to, and were only bent on destroying, and had no gratitude nor sense; and that was the ruin of him and of my father too."

"They were ignorant, and easily maddened," said Harold, gravely. "He did not know how little they could be controlled. I must find out the true state of things. Prometesky said I must read it up."

"Prometesky!" I cried in despair. "Oh, Harold, you have not been influenced by that old firebrand?"

"He taught me almost all I know," was the answer, still much to my dismay; but I showed Harold to the library, and directed him to some old books of my father's, which I fancied might enlighten him on the subjects on which he needed information, though I feared they might be rather out of date; and whenever he was not out of doors, he was reading them, sometimes running his fingers through his yellow hair, or pulling his beard, and growling to himself when he was puzzled or met with what he did not like. Eustace's

favourite study, meanwhile, was "Burke's Peerage," and his questions nearly drove me wild by their absurdity; and Dora rolled on the floor with my Spitz dog, for she loathed the doll I gave her, and made me more afraid of her than of either of the others.

Harold was all might and gentleness; Eustace viewed me as a glass of fashion and directory of English life and manners; but I saw they both looked to me not only to make their home, but to tame their little wild cat of a child; and that was enough to make her hate and distrust me. Moreover, she had a gleam of jealousy not far from fierce in her wild blue eyes if she saw Harold turn affectionately to me, and she always protested sullenly against the "next week," when I was to begin her education.

She could only read words of four letters, and could not, or would not, work a stitch. Harold had done all her mending. On the second day I passed by the open door of his room, and saw him at work on a great rectangular rent in her frock. I could not help

stopping to suggest that Colman or I might save him that trouble, whereupon Dora slammed the door in my face.

Harold opened it again at once, saying, "You ought to beg Aunt Lucy's pardon;" and when no apology could be extracted from her, and with thanks he handed over the little dress to me, she gave a shriek of anger (she hardly ever shed tears) and snatched it from me again.

"Well, well," said Harold, patting her curly head; "I'll finish this time, but not again, Dora. Next time, Aunt Lucy will be so good as to see to it. After old Betty's eyes grew bad we had to do our own needling."

I confess it was a wonderful performance—quite as neat as Colman could have made it; and I suspect that Harold did not refrain from producing needle and thread from his fat miscellaneous pocket-book, and repairing her many disasters before they reached the domestic eye; for there was a chronic feud between Dora and Colman, and the attempts of the latter to make the child more like a young lady were passionately

repelled, though she would better endure those of a rough little under-housemaid, whose civilisation was, I suppose, not quite so far removed from her own.

On Sunday, she and Harold disappeared as soon as breakfast was over, and only Eustace remained, spruce beyond all imagination, and giving himself childlike credit for not being with them; but when at church I can't say much for his behaviour. He stared unblushingly, whispered remarks and inquiries, could not find the places in his book, and appeared incapable of kneeling. Our little church at Arghouse was then a chapelry, with merely Sunday morning service by a curate from Mycening, and the congregation a village one, to the disgust of Eustace, who had expected to review his neighbours, and thought his get-up thrown away.

"No one at all to see," he observed with discontent over our luncheon, Harold and Dora having returned from roaming over Kalydon Moor.

"I go to afternoon service at Mycening, Harold," I said. "Will not you come with me?"

"There will be somebody there?" asked Eustace; to which I replied in the affirmative, but with some protest against his view of the object, and inviting the others again, but Dora defiantly answered that Harold was going to swing her on the ash tree.

"You ought to appear at church, Harry," said Eustace. "It is expected of an English squire. You see everybody, and everybody sees you."

"Well, then, go," said Harold.

"And won't you?" I entreated.

"I've promised to swing Dora," he answered, strolling out of the room, much to my concern; and though Eustace did accompany me, it was so evidently for the sake of staring that there was little comfort in that; and it was only by very severe looks that I could keep him from asking everyone's name. I hoped to make every one understand that he was not the squire, but no one came across us as we went out of church, and I had to reply to his torrent of inquiries all the way home.

It was a wet evening, and we all stayed in the house. Harold brought in one of his political economy studies from the library, and I tried to wile Dora to look at the pictures in a curious big old Dutch Scripture history, the Sunday delight of our youth.

Eustace came too, as if he wanted the amusement and yet was ashamed to take it, when he exclaimed, "I say, Harry; isn't this the book father used to tell us about—that they used to look over?"

Harold came, and stood towering above us with his hands in his pockets; but when we came to the Temptation of Eve, Dora broke out into an exclamation that excited my curiosity too much not to be pursued, though it was hardly edifying.

"Was that such a snake as Harold killed?"

"I have killed a good many snakes," he answered.

"Yes, but I meant the ones you killed when you were a little tiny boy."

"I don't remember," he said, as if to stop

the subject, hating, as he always did, to talk about himself.

"No, I know you don't," said Dora; "but it is quite true, isn't it, Eustace?"

"Hardly true that Harold ever was a little tiny boy," I could not help saying.

"No, he never was *little*," said Eustace. "But it is quite true about the snakes. I seem to remember it now, and I've often heard my mother and my Aunt Alice tell of it. It was at the first place where we were in New South Wales. I came running out screaming, I believe—I was old enough to know the danger—and when they went in there was Harry sitting on the floor, holding a snake tight by the neck and enjoying its contortions like a new toy."

"Of course," said Harold, "if it were poisonous, which I doubt, the danger would have been when I let go. My mother quietly bade me hold him tight, which I suppose I had just sense enough to do, and in another moment she had snatched up the bill-hook they had

been cutting wood with, and had his head off. She had the pluck."

I could but gasp with horror, and ask how old he was. About two! That was clear to their minds from the place where it happened, which Harold could not recollect, though Eustace could.

"But, Harold, you surely are the eldest," I said.

"Oh no; I am six months the eldest," said Eustace, proud of his advantage.

We were to hear more of that by-and-by.

Monday afternoon brought Mr. Prosser, who was closeted with Harold, while Eustace and I devoted our faculties to pacifying Dora under her exclusion, and preventing her from climbing up to the window-sill to gaze into the library from without. She scorned submission to either of us, so Eustace kept guard by lying on the grass below, and I coaxed her by gathering primroses, sowing seeds, and using all inducements I could think of, but my resources were nearly exhausted when Harold's head appeared

at the window, and he called, "Eustace! Lucy! here!"

We came at once, Dora before us.

"Come in," said Harold, admitting us at the glass door. "It is all a mistake. I am not the man. It is Eustace. Eu, I wish you joy, old chap——"

Mr. Prosser was at the table with a great will lying spread out on it. "I am afraid Mr. Alison is right, Miss Alison," he said. "The property is bequeathed to the eldest of the late Mr. Alison's grandsons born here, not specifying by which father. If I had copied the terms of the will I might have prevented disappointment, but I had no conception of what he tells me."

"But Ambrose was Harold's father," I exclaimed in bewilderment, "and he was the eldest."

"The seniority was not considered as certain," said Mr. Prosser, "and therefore the late Mr. Alison left the property to the eldest child born at home. 'Let us at least have an English-born heir,' I remember he said to me."

"And that is just what I am not," said Harold.

"I cannot understand! I have heard Miss Woolmer talk of poor Ambrose's beautiful child, several months older than Eustace's, and his name was Harold."

"Yes," said Harold, "but that one died on the voyage out, an hour or two before I was born. He was Harold Stanislas. I have no second name."

"And I always was the eldest," reiterated Eustace, hardly yet understanding what it involved.

All the needful documents had been preserved and brought home. There was the extract from the captain's log recording the burial at sea of Harold Stanislas Alison, aged fifteen months, and the certificate of baptism by a colonial clergyman of Harold, son of Ambrose and Alice Alison, while Eustace was entered in the Northchester register, having been born in lodgings, as Mr. Prosser well recollected, while his poor young father lay under sentence of death.

It burst on him at last. "Do you mean that I have got it, and not you?"

"That's about it," said Harold. "Never mind, Eu, it will all come to the same thing in the end."

"You have none of it?"

"Not an acre. It all goes together; but don't look at me in that way. There's Boola Boola, you know."

"You're not going back there to leave me?" exclaimed Eustace, with a real sound of dismay, laying hold of his arm.

"Not just yet, at any rate," said Harold.

"No, no; nor at all," reiterated Eustace, and then, satisfied by the absence of contradiction, which did, in fact, mean a good deal from the silent Harold, he began to discover his own accession of dignity. "Then it all belongs to me. I am master. I am squire—Eustace Alison, Esquire, of Arghouse. How well it sounds. Doesn't it, Harry, doesn't it, Lucy? Uncle Smith always said I was the one cut out for high life. Besides, I've been presented, and have been to a ball at Government House."

I saw that Mr. Prosser was a little overcome with amusement, and I wanted to make my retreat and carry off Dora, but she had perched on her favourite post—Harold's knee—and I was also needed to witness Eustace's signatures, as well as on some matters connected with my own property. So I stayed, and saw that he did indeed seem lost without his cousin's help. Neither knew anything about business of this kind, but Harold readily understood what made Eustace so confused, that he was quite helpless without Harold's explanations, and rather rough directions what he was to do. How like themselves their writing was! Eustace's neat and clerkly, but weak and illegible; and Harold's as distinct, and almost as large, as a schoolboy's copy, but with square-turned joints and strength of limb unlike any boy's writing.

The dressing-bell broke up the council, and Harold snatched up his hat to rush out and stretch his legs, but I could not help detaining him to say:

"Oh, Harry, I am so sorry!"

"Why?" he said.

"What does it leave you, Harry?"

"Half the capital stock farm, twelve thousand sheep, and a tidy sum in the Sydney bank," said Harold readily.

"Then I am afraid we shall lose you."

"That depends. I shall set Eustace in the way of doing what our fathers meant; and there's Prometesky—I shall not go till I have done his business."

I hardly knew what this meant, and could not keep Harold, whose long legs were eager for a rush in the fresh air; and the next person I met was Eustace.

"Aunt Lucy," he said, "that old fellow says you are going away. You can't be?"

I answered, truly enough, that I had not thought what to do, and he persisted that I had promised to stay.

"But that was with Harry," I said.

"I don't see why you should not stay as much with me," he said. "I'm your nephew all the same, and Dora is your niece; and she must

be made a proper sister for me, who have been, &c."

I don't know that this form of invitation was exactly the thing that would have kept me; but I had a general feeling that to leave these young men and my old home would be utter banishment, that there was nothing I so cared for as seeing how they got on, and that it was worth anything to me to be wanted anywhere and by anyone; so I gave Eustace to understand that I meant to stay. I rather wished Harold to have pressed me; but I believe the dear good fellow honestly thought everyone must prefer Eustace to himself; and it was good to see the pat he gave his cousin's shoulder when that young gentleman, nothing loath, exultingly settled down in the master's place.

Before long I found out what Harold meant about Prometesky's business; for we had scarcely begun dinner before he began to consult Mr. Prosser about the ways and means of obtaining a pardon for Prometesky. This considerably startled Mr. Prosser. Some cabinets, he said,

were very lenient to past political offences, but Prometesky seemed to him to have exceeded all bounds of mercy.

"You never knew the true facts, then?" said Harold.

"I know the facts that satisfied the jury."

"You never saw my father's statement?"

No, Mr. Prosser had been elsewhere, and had not been employed in my brother's trial; he had only inherited the connection with our family affairs when the matter had passed into comparative oblivion.

My brothers had never ceased to affirm that he had only started for the farm that had been Lewthwayte's on hearing that an attack was to be made on it, in hopes of preventing it, and that the witness, borne against him on the trial by a fellow who had turned king's evidence, had been false; but they had been unheeded, or rather Prometesky was regarded as the most truly mischievous of all, as perhaps he really had been, since he had certainly drawn them into the affair, and his life had barely been saved in

consideration of his having rescued a child from the fire at great personal peril.

Ambrose had written again and again about him to my father, but as soon as the name occurred the letter had been torn up. On their liberation from actual servitude they had sent up their statement to the Government of New South Wales; but in the meantime Prometesky had fared much worse than they had. They had been placed in hands where their education, superiority, and good conduct had gained them trust and respect, and they had quickly obtained a remission of the severer part of their sentence and become their own masters; indeed, if Ambrose had lived, he would soon have risen to eminence in the colony. But Prometesky had fallen to the lot of a harsh, rude master, who hated him as a foreigner, and treated him in a manner that roused the proud spirit of the noble. The master had sworn that the convict had threatened his life, and years of working in chains on the roads had been the consequence. It was no time for entertaining a petition on

his account, and before the expiration of this additional sentence Ambrose was dead.

By that time Eustace, now a rich and prosperous man, would gladly have taken his old tutor to his home, but Prometesky was still too proud, and all that he would do was to build a little hut under a rock on the Boola Boola grounds, where he lived upon the proceeds of such joiner's and watchmaker's work as was needed by the settlers on a large area, when things were much rougher than even when my nephews came home. No one cared for education enough to make his gifts available in that direction, except as concerned Harold, who had, in fact, learnt of him almost all he knew in an irregular, voluntary sort of fashion, and who loved him heartily.

His health was failing now, and to bring him home was one of Harold's prime objects, since London advice might yet restore him. Harold had made one attempt in his cause at Sydney, sending in a copy of his father's dying statement, also signed by his uncle; but though he was told that it had been received, he had no encourage-

ment to hope it would be forwarded, and had been told that to apply direct to the Secretary of State, backed by persons from our own neighbourhood, would be the best chance, and on this he consulted Mr. Prosser, but without meeting much sympathy. Mr. Prosser said many people's minds had changed with regard to English or Irish demagogues, and that the Alison Brothers themselves might very probably have been pardoned, but everyone was tired of Poles, and popular tradition viewed Prometesky as the ogre of the past. Mr. Prosser did not seem as if he would even very willingly assist in the drawing up in due form a petition in the Pole's favour, and declared that without some influential person to introduce it, it would be perfectly useless.

Eustace turned round with, "There, you see, Harold, nothing can be done."

"I do not see that," said Harold, in his quiet way.

"You do not mean to do anything?"

"Yes, I do."

"But what—what? What can you do?"

"I do not yet know."

"You see it is of no use. We shall only get into a scrape with all the gentlemen of the county."

"Never mind now, Eustace," said Harold, briefly. But I knew the expression of his face by this time quite well enough to be certain that nothing would make him abandon the cause of his father's old friend; and that his silence was full of the strongest determination. I think it fascinated me, and though in my cooler senses I reverted to my old notion of Prometesky as a dangerous firebrand, I could not help feeling for and with the youth whose soul was set on delivering his friend from exile.

My turn came the next morning, before Mr. Prosser went away. He had much to say against my making Arghouse my home, telling me that I had a full independence and could live where I pleased; but that I knew already, and had decided on the amount I ought to pay towards the housekeeping.

Then he wanted me to understand how the young men were looked upon, and the dread

all the neighbourhood had of them. I said I had shared this dread, but on better acquaintance I found it quite undeserved, and this being the case it was incumbent on their only relation to stand by them, and not shun them as if they had brought the leprosy.

This he allowed, calling it a generous feeling, if they were worthy of it. But what greatly amazed me was his rejoicing that Eustace had proved to be the heir, since nothing was known against him, and when the other young man was gone there was hope that any little distrusts might be allayed, and that he might ultimately take his place in the county.

The other young man! Why should there be any distrust of Harold? I grew hot and indignant, and insisted on knowing what was meant; but Mr. Prosser declared that he knew nothing, only there were vague reports which made him rejoice that Mr. Harold Alison was not called to be the manager of the property, and would make him question whether a young lady would find it expedient to be long an inmate of the same house.

What reports could he mean? No—I could get no more out of him; he was too cautious to commit himself, and seemed to be satisfied by observing that if I changed my mind, I could at any time leave my nephews.

"Her nephews," I heard him mutter to himself; "yes, her nephews. No one has any right to object, and she can but judge for herself—there's no harm done."

I shall always believe, however, that he set on my friends to remonstrate, for letters began coming in, in all the senses of the imperative mood, commanding and entreating me to leave Arghouse. There was one such as only Lord Erymanth could write. He was an old man, and never could make short work of anything. They say that his chief political value was to be set on when anyone was wanted to speak against time. I know he was very dreadful at all the platforms in the county; but he was very good and conscientious, and everyone looked up to him as a sort of father of the country.

But oh! that letter! Such a battery of heavy

arguments against my unprecedented step in taking up my residence with these unfortunate young men, who, though they had not themselves openly transgressed the law of the land, yet were the offspring of unhallowed unions with the children of a felon. I cannot go through it all, but it hinted that besides their origin, there was some terrible stain on Harold, and that society could not admit them; so that if I persisted in casting in my lot with them, I should share the ban. Indeed, he would have thought my own good sense and love of decorum would have taught me that the abode of two such youths would be no fit place for the daughter of such respected parents, and there was a good deal more that I could not understand about interceding with his sister, and her overlooking my offence in consideration of my inexperience and impulsiveness.

On my first impulse I wrote to thank my old friend, but to say I could see no harm in an aunt's being with her nephews, and that I was sure he had only to know them to lay aside all doubts of their being thorough gentlemen and associates for

anybody. My little niece required my care, and I should stay and give it to her till some other arrangement was made. If Lady Diana were displeased with me, I was very sorry, but I could see no reason for it.

When I looked over the old Earl's letter, before closing mine, some expressions wound out of the mist that made me uncomfortable, especially when I recollected that, though it was a week since their arrival, no one had attempted to call but Mr. Crosse, the vicar of Mycening, a very "good man in the pulpit," as the servants said, and active in the parish, but underbred and no companion.

Our neighbourhood was what is called very clannish. There were two families, the Horsmans and the Stympsons, who seemed to make up all the society. The sons either had the good livings, or had retired from their professions into cottages round and about, and the first question after any party was, how many of each. The outsiders, not decidedly of inferior rank, were almost driven into making a little clique—if so it might be called—of

their own, and hanging together the more closely. Lord Erymanth of course predominated; but he was a widower of many years' standing, and his heir lived in a distant county. His sister, Lady Diana, had been married to an Irish Mr. Tracy, who had been murdered after a few years by his tenants, upon which she had come with her three children to live at Arked House. I never could guess how she came to marry an Irish landlord, and I always thought she must have exasperated his people. She was viewed as the perfection of a Lady Bountiful and pattern of excellence; but, I confess, that I always thought of her when I heard of the devout and honourable women who were stirred up against St. Paul. She was a person who was admired more than she was liked, and who was greatly praised and honoured, but somehow did not proportionably endear herself on closer acquaintance, doing a great deal of good, but all to large masses rather than individuals. However, all the neighbourhood had a pride in her, and it was a distinction to be considered a fit companion for Diana and Viola Tracy. I never

cared for Di, who was her mother over again, and used to set us to rights with all her might; but she had married early, a very rich man—and Viola and I had always been exceedingly fond of one another, so that I could not bear to be cut off from her, however I might be disposed to defy her mother.

The upshot of my perplexities was that I set off to Mycening to lay them before Miss Woolmer, another of the few belonging to neither clan, to know what all this meant, as well as to be interested in my nephews.

Mycening is one of the prettiest country towns I know, at least it was twenty years ago. There is a very wide street, unpaved, but with a broad smooth gravelled way, slightly sloping down towards the little clean stone-edged gutters that border the carriage road along the centre, which is planted on each side with limes cut into arches. The houses are of all sorts, some old timbered gable-ended ones with projecting upper stories, like our own, others of the handsome old Queen Anne type with big sash windows, and others

quite modern. Some have their gardens in front, some stand flush with the road, and the better sort are mixed with the shops and cottages.

Miss Woolmer lived in a tiny low one, close to the road, where, from her upstairs floor, she saw all that came and went, and, intellectual woman as she certainly was, she thoroughly enjoyed watching her neighbours, as by judiciously-arranged looking-glasses, she could do all up and down the street. I believe she had been a pretty woman, though on a small scale, and now she had bright eyes, and a very sweet bright look, though in complexion she had faded into the worn pallor that belongs to permanent ill health. She dressed nicely, and if she had been well, might, at her age, scarcely above forty, have been as much a young lady as Philippa Horsman; but I fancy the great crush of her life had taken away her girlhood and left her no spring of constitution to resist illness, so that she had sunk into a regular crippled invalid before I could remember, though her mind was full of activity.

"You are come to tell me about them, my

dear," was her greeting. "I've seen them. No, I don't mean that they have been to see me. You'll bring them some day, won't you? I'm sure Ambrose's boy would come to see a sick woman. I watched one of them yesterday pick up old Molly's oranges for her in the street, when her basket got upset by a cart, and he then paid her for them, and gave them among the children round. It did my heart good, I'd not seen such a sight since the boys were sent away."

"Harold would do anything kind," I said, "or to see an old friend of his father. The worst of it is that there seem to be so few who wish to see him, or can even forgive me for staying with him."

I showed her Lord Erymanth's letter, and told her of the others, asking her what it meant. "Oh, as to Lady Diana," she said, "there is no doubt about that. She was greatly offended at your having sent away her carriage and not having taken her advice, and she goes about saying she is disappointed in you."

For my mother's sake, and my little Viola,

and Auld Lang Syne besides, I was much hurt, and defended myself in a tone of pique which made Miss Woolmer smile and say she was far from blaming me, but that she thought I ought to count the cost of my remaining at Arghouse. And then she told me that the whole county was up in arms against the new comers, not only from old association of their name with revolutionary notions, but because the old Misses Stympson, of Lake Side, who had connections in New South Wales, had set it abroad that the poor boys were ruffians, companions of the double-dyed villain Prometesky, and that Harold in especial was a marked man, who had caused the death of his own wife in a frenzy of intoxication.

At this I fairly laughed. Harold, at his age, who never touched liquor, and had lived a sort of hermit life in the Bush, to be saddled with a wife only to have destroyed her! The story contradicted itself by its own absurdity; and those two Miss Stympsons were well-known scandal-mongers. Miss Woolmer never believed a story of theirs without sifting, but she had

been in a manner commissioned to let me know that society was determined not to accept Eustace and Harold Alison, and was irate at my doing so. Mothers declared that they should be very sorry to give poor Lucy Alison up, but that they could not have their children brought into contact with young men little better than convicts, and whom they *would*, besides, call my cousins, instead of my nephews. "I began to suspect it," I said, "when nobody left cards but Mr. Lawless and Peter Parsons."

"And that is the society they are to be left to?"

"But I shall not leave them," I cried. "Why should I, to please Miss Stympson and Lord Erymanth? I shall stand by my own brothers' sons against all the world."

"And if they be worthy, Lucy, your doing so is the best chance of their weathering the storm. See! is not that one of them? The grand-looking giant one, who moves like a king of men. He is Ambrose's son, is he not? What a pity he is not the squire!"

Harold was, in effect, issuing from the toy-shop, carrying an immense kite on his arm, like a shield, while Dora frisked round in admiration, and a train of humbler admirers flocked in the rear.

I hurried down into the street to tell Harold of my old friend's wish to see them, and he followed me at once, with that manner which was not courtesy, because, without being polished, it was so much more. Dora was much displeased, being ardent on the kite's tail, and followed with sullen looks, while Harold had to stoop low to get into the room, and brushed the low ceiling with his curly hair as he stood upright, Miss Woolmer gazing up to the very top of him. I think she was rather disappointed that he had not taken more after his father; and she told him that he was like his uncle Lewthwayte, looking keenly to see whether he shrunk from the comparison to a man who had died a felon's death; but he merely answered, "So I have been told."

Then she asked for his mother, and he briefly

replied that she was well and in New Zealand. There was an attempt at noticing Dora, to which she responded like the wild opossum that she was, and her fidgeting carried the day. Harold only made answer to one or two more observations, and then could not but take leave, promising on the entreaty of the old lady, to come and see her again. I outstayed them, being curious to hear her opinion.

"A superb being," she said, with a long breath; "there's the easy strength of a Greek demigod in every tread."

"He seems to me more like Thor in Nifelheim," I said, "being, no doubt, half a Viking to begin with."

"They are all the same, as people tell us now," she said, smiling. "Any way, he looks as if he was a waif from the heroic age. But, my dear, did not I hear him call you Lucy?"

"They generally do."

"I would not let them. Cling to your auntship; it explains your being with them. A grand

creature! I feel like the people who had had a visit from the gods of old."

"And you understand how impossible it would be to run away," I said.

She smiled, but added, "Lucy, my dear, that looked very like a wedding-ring!"

I could not think it possible. Why, he was scarcely five-and-twenty! And yet the suggestion haunted me, whenever my eyes fell on his countenance in repose, and noted the habitual sadness of expression which certainly did not match with the fine open face that seemed fitted to express the joy of strength. It came on me too when, at the lodge, a child who had been left alone too long and had fallen into an unmitigated agony of screaming, Harry had actually, instead of fleeing from the sound, gone in, taken the screamer in his arms, and so hushed and pacified it, that on the mother's return she found it at perfect rest.

"One would think the gentleman was a father himself, ma'am," she had said to me; and thereupon Harold had coloured, and turned hastily

aside, so that the woman fancied she had offended him and apologised, so that he had been forced to look back again and say, "Never mind," and "No harm done," with a half laugh, which, as it now struck me, had a ring of pain in it, and was not merely the laugh of a shy young man under an impossible imputation. True, I knew he was not a religious man, but to believe actual ill of him seemed to me impossible.

He had set himself to survey the Arghouse estate, so as to see how those dying wishes of his father could best be carried out, and he was making himself thoroughly acquainted with every man, woman, child, and building, to the intense jealousy of Bullock, who had been agent all through my mother's time, and had it all his own way. He could not think why "Mr. Harold" should be always hovering about the farms and cottages, sometimes using his own ready colonial hand to repair deficiencies, and sometimes his purse, and making the people take fancies into their heads that were never there before, and which would make Mr. Alison lose hundreds a

year if they were attended to. And as Mr. Alison always did attend to his cousin, and gave orders accordingly, the much-aggrieved Bullock had no choice but in delaying their execution and demonstrating their impracticability, whereas, of course, Harold did not believe in impossibilities.

It was quite true, as he had once said, that though he could not bring about improvements as readily as if he had been landlord, yet he could get at the people much better, and learn their own point of view of what was good for them. They were beginning to idolise him; for, indeed, there was a fascination about him which no one could resist. I sometimes wondered what it was, considering that he was so slow of speech, and had so little sunshine of mirth about him.

I never did enforce my title of Aunt, in spite of Miss Woolmer's advice. It sounded too ridiculous, and would have hindered the sisterly feeling that held us together.

Eustace was restless and vexed at not being

called upon, and anxious to show himself on any occasion, and I was almost equally anxious to keep him back, out of reach of mortification. Both he and Harold went to London on business, leaving Dora with me. The charge was less severe than I expected. My first attempts at teaching her had been frustrated by her scorn of me, and by Harold's baffling indulgence; but one day, when they had been visiting one of the farms, the children had been made to exhibit their acquirements, which were quite sufficient to manifest Dora's ignorance. Eustace had long declared that if she would not learn of me she must either have a governess or go to school, and I knew she was fit for neither. Harold, I believe, now enforced the threat, and when he went away, left her a black silk necktie to be hemmed for him, and a toy book with flaming illustrations, with an assurance that on her reading it to him on his return, depended his giving her a toy steam-engine.

Dora knew that Harold kept his word, even with her. I think she had a great mind to get

no one's assistance but the kitchenmaid's, but this friendship was abruptly terminated by Dora's arraying the kangaroo in Sarah's best bonnet and cloak, and launching it upon a stolen interview between her and her sweetheart. The screams brought all the house together, and, as the hero was an undesirable party who had been forbidden the house, Sarah viewed it as treachery on Miss Dora's part, and sulked enough to alienate her.

Dora could make out more to herself in a book than she could read aloud, and one day I saw her spelling over the table of degrees of marriage in a great folio Prayer-Book, which she had taken down in quest of pictures. Some time later in the day, she said, "Lucy, are you Harry's father's sister?" and when I said yes, she added, with a look of discovery, "A man cannot marry his father's sister."

It was no time to protest against the marriage of first cousins. I was glad enough that from that time the strange child laid aside her jealousy of me; and that thenceforth her resistance was

simply the repugnance of a wild creature to be taught and tamed. Ultimately she let me into the recesses of that passionate heart, and, as I think, loved me better than anybody else, except Harold; but even so, at an infinite distance from that which seemed the chief part of her whole being.

CHAPTER II.

THE LION OF NEME HEATH.

THE work was done. The sixteen pages of large-type story book were stumbled through; and there was a triumphant exhibition when the cousins came home — Eustace delighted; Harold, half-stifled by London, insisting on walking home from the station to stretch his legs, and going all the way round over Kalydon Moor for a whiff of air!

If we had not had a few moors and heaths where he could breathe, I don't know whether he could have stayed in England; and as for London, the din, the dinginess, the squalor of houses and people, sat like a weight on his heart.

"They told me a great deal had been done for England. It is just nothing," he said, and hardly anything else that whole evening; while Eustace, accoutred point-device by a London tailor, poured forth volumes of what he had seen and done. Mr. Prosser made up a dinner party for them, and had taken them to an evening party or two—at least, Eustace; for after the first Harold had declined, and had spent his time in wandering about London by gas-light, and standing on the bridges, or trying how far it was on each side to green fields, and how much misery lay between.

Eustace had evidently been made much of, and had enjoyed himself greatly. It grieved me that his first entrance into society should be under no better auspices than those of the family solicitor; but he did not yet perceive this, and was much elated. "I flatter myself it was rather a success," was the phrase he had brought home, *à propos* to everything he had worn or done, from his tie to his shoe-buckles. He told me the price of everything, all the dis-

cussions with his tradesmen, and all the gazes fixed on him, with such simplicity that I could not help caring; and there sat Harold in his corner, apparently asleep, but his eye now and then showing that he was thinking deeply.

"Lucy," he said, as we bade one another good-night, "is nothing being done?"

"About what?" I asked.

"For all that wretchedness."

"Oh yes, there are all sorts of attempts," and I told him of model cottages, ragged schools, and the like, and promised to find him the accounts; but he gave one of his low growls, as if this were but a mockery of the direful need.

He had got his statement of Prometesky's case properly drawn up, and had sent up a copy, but in vain; and had again been told that some influential person must push it to give it any chance. Mr. Prosser's acquaintance lay in no such line; or, at least, were most unlikely to promote the pardon of an old incendiary.

"What will you do?" I asked. "Must you give it up?"

"Never! I will make a way at last."

Meantime, he was necessary to Eustace in accomplishing all the details of taking possession. Horses were wanted by both, used to riding as they had always been, and there was an old-fashioned fair on Neme Heath, just beyond Mycening, rather famous for its good show of horses, where there was a chance of finding even so rare an article as a hunter up to Harold's weight, also a pony for Dora.

An excellent show of wild beasts was also there. Harold had been on the heath when it was being arranged in the earliest morning hours, and had fraternised with the keepers, and came home loquacious far more than usual on the wonders he had seen. I remember that, instead of being disappointed in the size of the lions and tigers, he dwelt with special admiration on their supple and terrible strength of spine and paw.

He wanted to take Dora at once to the menagerie, but I represented the inexpedience of their

taking her about with them to the horse-fair afterwards, and made Eustace perceive that it would not do for Miss Alison; and as Harold backed my authority, she did not look like thunder for more than ten minutes when she found we were to drive to Neme Heath, and that she was to go home with me after seeing the animals. Eustace was uncertain about his dignity, and hesitated about not caring and not intending, and not liking me to go alone, but made up his mind that since he had to be at the fair, he would drive us.

So we had out the barouche, and Eustace held the reins with infinite elation, while Harold endured the interior to reconcile Dora to it, and was as much diverted as she was at the humours of the scene, exclaiming at every stall of gilt gingerbread, every see-saw, and merry-go-round, that lined the suburbs of Mycening, and I strongly suspect meditating a private expedition to partake of their delights. Harold was thoroughly the great child nature meant him for, while poor Eustace sat aloft enfolded in his dignity, not daring to look right or left, or utter a word of surprise, lest he should

compromise himself in the eyes of the coachman by his side.

The fair was upon the heath, out to which the new part of the town was stretching itself, and long streets of white booths extended themselves in their regular order. We drove on noiselessly over the much-trodden turf, until we were checked by the backward rush of a frightened crowd, and breathless voices called out to Eustace, "Stop, sir; turn, for Heaven's sake. The lion! He's loose!"

Turning was impossible, for the crowd was rushing back on us, blocking us up; and Eustace dropped the reins, turning round with a cry of "Harry! Harry! I see him. Take us away!"

Harold sprang on the back seat as the coachman jumped down to run to the horses' heads. He saw over the people's heads, and after that glance made one bound out of the carriage. I saw then what I shall never forget, across the wide open space round which the principal shows were arranged, and which was now entirely bare of people. On the other side, between the shafts of a waggon, too low for him to creep under, lay

the great yellow lion, waving the tufted end of his tail as a cat does, when otherwise still, showing the glassy glare of his eyes now and then, growling with a horrible display of fangs, and holding between those huge paws a senseless boy as a sort of hostage. From all the lanes between the booths the people were looking in terror, ready for a rush on the beast's least movement, shrieking calls to someone to save the boy, fetch a gun, bring the keeper, &c.

That moment, with the great thick carriage-rug on his arm, Harold darted forward, knocking down a gun which some foolish person had brought from a shooting-gallery, and shouting, "Don't! It will only make him kill the boy!" he gathered himself up for a rush; while I believe we all called to him to stop: I am sure of Eustace's "Harry! don't! What shall I do?"

Before the words were spoken, Harold had darted to the side of the terrible creature, and with a bound, vaulted across its neck as it lay, dealing it a tremendous blow over the nose with that sledge-hammer fist, and throwing the rug

over its head. Horrible roaring growls, like snarling thunder, were heard for a second or two, and one man dashed out of the frightened throng, rifle in hand, just in time to receive the child, whom Harold flung to him, snatched from the lion's grasp; and again we saw a wrestling, struggling, heaving mass, Harry still uppermost, pinning the beast down with his weight and the mighty strength against which it struggled furiously. Having got free of the boy, his one ally was again aiming his rifle at the lion's ear, when two keepers, with nets and an iron bar, came on the scene, one shouting not to shoot, and the other holding up the bar and using some word of command, at which the lion cowered and crouched. The people broke into a loud cheer after their breathless silence, and it roused the already half-subdued lion. There was another fierce and desperate struggle, lasting only a moment, and ended by the report of the rifle.

In fact, the whole passed almost like a flash of lightning from the moment of our first halt, till the crowd closed in, so that I could only see

one bare yellow head, towering above the hats, and finally cleaving a way towards us, closely followed by Dermot Tracy, carrying the rifle and almost beside himself with enthusiasm and excitement. "Lucy—is it you? What, he is your cousin! I never saw anything like it! He mastered it alone, quite alone!"

And then we heard Harry bidding those around not touch him, and Dora screamed with dismay, and I saw he had wrapped both hands in his handkerchief. To my frightened question, whether he was hurt, he answered, "Only my hands, but I fancy the brute has done for some of my fingers. If those fellows could but have held their tongues!"

He climbed into the carriage to rid himself of the crowd, who were offering all sorts of aid, commiseration, and advice, and Dermot begged to come too, "in case he should be faint," which made Harry smile, though he was in much pain, frowning and biting his lip while the coachman took the reins, and turned us round amid the deafening cheers of the people, for Eustace was

quite unnerved, and Dora broke into sobs as she saw the blood soaking through the handkerchiefs —all that we could contribute. He called her a little goose, and said it was nothing; but the great drops stood on his brow, he panted and moved restlessly, as if sitting still were unbearable, and he could hardly help stamping out the bottom of the carriage. He shouted to Eustace to let him walk, but Dermot showed him how he would thus have the crowd about him in a moment. It was the last struggle that had done the mischief, when the lion, startled by the shout of the crowd, had turned on him again, and there had been a most narrow escape of a dying bite, such as would probably have crushed his hand itself beyond all remedy; and, as it was, one could not but fear he was dreadfully hurt, when the pain came in accesses of violence several times in the short distance to Dr. Kingston's door.

No, Dr. Kingston was not at home; nor would be in for some time; but while we were thinking what to do, a young man came hastily up, saying,

"I am Dr. Kingston's partner; can I do anything?"

Harold sprang out on this, forbidding Eustace to follow him, but permitting Dermot; and Mrs. Kingston, an old acquaintance of mine, came and invited us all to her drawing-room, lamenting greatly her husband's absence, and hoping that Mr. Yolland, his new partner, would be able to supply his place. The young man had very high testimonials and an excellent education. She was evidently exercised between her own distrust of the assistant and fear of disparaging him. Seeing how much shaken we were, she sent for wine, and I was surprised to see Eustace take some almost furtively, but his little sister, though still sobbing, glared out from behind the knuckles she was rubbing into her eyes, and exclaimed, "Eustace, I shall tell Harry."

"Hold your tongue," said Eustace, petulantly; "Harry has nothing to do with it."

Mrs. Kingston looked amazed. I set to work to talk them both down, and must have given a very wild, nervous account of the disaster. At

last Dermot opened the door for Harry, who came in, looking very pale, with one hand entirely covered and in a sling, the other bound up all but the thumb and forefinger. To our anxious inquiries, he replied that the pain was much better now, and he should soon be all right; and then, on being further pressed, admitted that the little finger had been so much crushed that it had been taken off from the first joint, the other three fingers had been broken and were in splints, and the right hand was only torn and scratched. Mrs. Kingston exclaimed at this that Mr. Yolland should have waited for the doctor to venture on such an operation, but both Dermot and Harold assured her that he could not have waited, and also that it could not have been more skilfully done, both of which assurances she must have heard with doubts as to the competence of the judges, and she much regretted that she could not promise a visit from her doctor that evening, as he was likely to be detained all night.

Dermot came downstairs with us, and we

found Mr. Yolland waiting at the door to extract a final promise that Harold would go to bed at once on coming home. It seemed that he had laughed at the recommendation, so that the young surgeon felt bound to enforce it before all of us, adding that it was a kind of hurt that no one could safely neglect. There was something in his frank, brusque manner that pleased Harold, and he promised with half a smile, thanking the doctor hastily as he did so, while Dermot Tracy whispered to me, "Good luck getting him; twice as ready as the old one;" and then vehemently shaking all our hands, to make up for Harold's not being fit to touch, he promised to come and see him on the morrow. The moment we were all in the carriage—Eustace still too much shaken to drive home—his first question was, who *that* was?

"Mr. Tracy," I answered; and Eustace added, "I thought you called him Dermont?"

"Dermot—Dermot Tracy. I have known him all our lives."

"I saw he was a gentleman by his boots,"

quoth Eustace with deliberation, holding out his own foot as a standard. "I saw they were London made."

"How fortunate that you had not on your Sydney ones," I could not help saying in mischief.

"I took care of that," was the complacent answer. "I told Richardson to take them all away."

I don't think Harold saw the fun. They had neither of them any humour; even Harold was much too simple and serious.

Eustace next treated us to a piece of his well-conned manual, and demonstrated that Dermot St. Glear Tracy, Esquire, of Killy Marey, County Cavan, Ireland, was grandson to an English peer, great grandson to an Irish peer, and nephew to the existing Edward St. Glear, 6th Earl of Erymanth. "And a very fashionable young man," he went on, "distinguished in the sporting world."

"An excellent good fellow, with plenty of pluck," said Harold warmly. "Is he not brother to the pretty little girl who was with you when we came?"

I answered as briefly as I could; I did not want to talk of the Tracys. My heart was very sore about them, and I was almost relieved when Dora broke in with a grave accusing tone: "Harry, Eustace drank a glass of wine, and I said I would tell you!"

"Eustace has no reason to prevent him," was Harold's quiet answer.

"And, really, I think, in my position, it is ridiculous, you see," Eustace began stammering, but was wearily cut short by Harold with, "As you please."

Eustace could never be silent long, and broke forth again: "Harold, your ring."

By way of answer Harold, with his available thumb and finger, showed the ring for a moment from his waistcoat pocket. Instantly Dora sprang at it, snatched it from his finger before he was aware, and with all her might flung it into the river, for we were crossing the bridge.

There was strength in that thumb and finger to give her a sharp fierce shake, and the low voice that said "Dora" was like the lion's growl.

"It's Meg's ring, and I hate her!" she cried.

"For shame, Dorothy."

The child burst into a flood of tears and sobbed piteously, but it was some minutes before he would relent and look towards her. Eustace scolded her for making such a noise, and vexing Harold when he was hurt, but that only made her cry the more. I told her to say she was sorry, and perhaps Harold would forgive her; but she shook her head violently at this.

Harold relented, unable to bear the sight of distress. "Don't tease her," he said, shortly, to us both. "Hush, Dora; there's an end of it."

This seemed to be an amnesty, for she leant against his knee again.

"Dora, how could you?" I said, when we were out of the carriage, and the two young men had gone upstairs together.

"It was Meg's ring, and I hate her," answered Dora, with the fierce wild gleam in her eyes.

"You should not hate anyone," was, of course, my answer.

"But she's dead!" said Dora, triumphantly as a little tigress.

"So much the worse it is to hate her. Who was she?"

"His wife," said Dora.

I durst not ask the child any more questions.

"Eustace, who is Meg?"

I could not but ask that question as we sat *tête-à-tête* after dinner, Dora having gone to carry Harold some fruit, and being sure to stay with him as long as he permitted.

Eustace looked round with a startled, cautious eye, as if afraid of being overheard, and said, as Dora had done, "His wife."

"Not alive!"

"Oh no—thank goodness."

"At his age!"

"He was but twenty when he married her. A bad business! I knew it could not be otherwise. She was a storekeeper's daughter."

Then I learnt, in Eustace's incoherent style, the sad story I understood better afterwards.

This miserable marriage had been the outcome

of the desolate state of the family after the loss of all the higher spirits of the elder generation. For the first few years after my brothers had won their liberation, and could hold property, they had been very happy, and the foundations of their prosperity at Boola Boola had been laid. Had Ambrose lived he would, no doubt, have become a leading man in the colony, where he had heartily embraced his lot and shaped his career.

Poor Eustace was, however, meant by nature for a quiet, refined English gentleman, living in his affections. He would never have transgressed ordinary bounds save for his brother's overmastering influence. He drooped from the time of Ambrose's untimely death, suffered much from the loss of several children, and gradually became a prey to heart complaint. But his wife was full of sense and energy, and Ambrose's plans were efficiently carried on, so that all went well till Alice's marriage ; and, a year or two later on, Dorothy's death, in giving birth to her little girl, no woman was left at the farm but a rough

though kind-hearted old convict, who did her best for the motherless child.

Harold, then sixteen, and master of his father's half of the property, was already its chief manager. He was, of course, utterly unrestrained, doing all kinds of daring and desperate things in the exuberance of his growing strength, and, though kind to his feeble uncle, under no authority, and a thorough young barbarian of the woods; the foremost of all the young men in every kind of exploit, as marksman, rider, hunter, and what-not, and wanting also to be foremost in the good graces of Meg Cree, the handsome daughter of the keeper of the wayside store on the road to Sydney, where young stock-farmers were wont to meet, with the price of their wool fresh in their hands. It was the rendezvous for all that was collectively done in the district; and many were the orgies and revelries in which Harold had shared when a mere boy in all but strength and stature, and ungovernable in proportion to the growing forces within him.

Of course she accepted him, with his grand

physical advantages and his good property. There was rivalry enough to excite him, her beauty was sufficient to fire his boyish fancy; and opposition only maddened his headstrong will. A loud, boisterous, self-willed boy, with already strength, courage, and power beyond those of most grown men; his inclination light and unformed, as the attachments of his age usually are, was so backed that he succeeded where failure would have been a blessing.

My poor brother Eustace! what must not Harold's marriage have been to him! Into the common home, hitherto peaceful if mournful, was brought this coarse, violent, uneducated woman, jealous of him and his family, unmeasured in rudeness, contemning all the refinements to which he clung, and which even then were second nature to the youths, boasting over him for being a convict, whereas her father was a free settler, and furious at any act of kindness or respect to him from her husband.

She must have had a sort of animal jealousy, for the birth of her first child rendered her so

savagely intolerant of poor Dora's fondness for Harold, that the offer of a clergyman's wife to take charge of the little girl was thankfully accepted by her father, though it separated him from his darling by more than fifty miles.

The woman's plan seemed to be to persecute the two Eustaces out of her house, since she could not persuade Harold that it was not as much theirs as his own. They clung on, as weak men do, for want of energy to make a change, and Eustace said his father would never complain; but Harold never guessed how much she made him suffer. Home had become a wretched place to all, and Harold was more alienated from it, making long expeditions, staying out as long and as late as he could whenever business or pleasure called him away, and becoming, alas, more headlong and reckless in the pursuit of amusement. There were fierce hot words when he came home, and though a tender respect for his uncle was the one thing in which he never failed, the whole grand creature was being wrecked and ruined

by the wild courses to which home misery was driving him.

After about three years of this kind of life, Meg, much against his will, went to her father's station for the birth of her second child; lingered in the congenial atmosphere there far longer than was necessary after her recovery, and roused Harold's jealousy to a violent pitch by her demeanour towards a fellow of her own rank, whom she probably would have married but for Harold's unfortunate advantages, and whom she now most perilously preferred.

The jollification after the poor child's long-deferred christening ended in furious language on both sides, Meg insisting that she would not go home while "the old man" remained at Boola Boola, Harold swearing that she should come at once, and finally forcing her into his buggy, silencing by sheer terror her parents' endeavours to keep them at least till morning, rather than drive in his half-intoxicated condition across the uncleared country in the moonlight.

In the early morning Harold stood at their

door dazed and bleeding, with his eldest child crushed and moaning in his arms. Almost without a word he gave it to the grandmother, and then guided the men at hand, striding on silently before them, to the precipitous bank of a deep gulley some twelve miles off. In the bottom lay the carriage broken to pieces, and beside it, where Harold had dragged them out, Meg and her baby both quite dead—where he had driven headlong down in the darkness.

The sun was burning hot when they brought her back in the cart, Harold walking behind with the little one in his arms, and when he had laid it down at home, the elder one wailed till he took it. It was a fine boy of two years old, the thing he loved best in the world; but with a broken spine there was no hope for it, and for a whole day and night he held it, pacing the room, and calling it, speaking to and noticing no one else, and touching no food, only slaking his thirst with the liquor that stood at hand, until the poor little thing died in convulsions.

Unhappily, he had scarcely laid it down be-

side its mother and brother, when he saw his rival in the outer room of the store, and with one deadly imprecation, and a face which Eustace could not think of without horror, challenged him to fight, and in a second or two had struck him down, with a fractured skull. But the deed was done in undoubted brain fever. That was quite established, and for ten days after he was desperately ill and in the wildest delirium, probably from some injury to the head in the fall, aggravated by all that followed.

Neither magistrate nor doctor was called in, but Prometesky came to their help, and when he grew calmer, brought him home, where his strength rallied, but his mind was for some time astray. For weeks he alternated between moods of speechless apathy and hours of frenzy, which, from his great strength, must have been fatal to someone if he had not always known his gentle, feeble old uncle, and obeyed his entreaties, even when Prometesky lost power with him.

In this remote part of the country no one

interfered; the Crees, whose presence maddened him, were afraid to approach, and only Prometesky sustained the hopes of the two Eustaces by his conviction that this was not permanent insanity, but a passing effect of the injury; and they weathered that dreadful time till the frantic fits ceased, and there was only the dull, silent, stoniness of look and manner, lasting on after his health had entirely returned, and he had begun mechanically to attend to the farm and stock, and give orders to the men.

The final cure was the message that Dora was lost in the Bush. Harold had the keen sagacity of a black fellow, and he followed up the track with his unwearied strength until, on the third day, he found her, revived her with the food he had brought with him, and carried her home. There was only just nourishment enough to support her, and he took none himself, so that when he laid her down beside her father, he was so spent that, after a mouthful or two, he slept for twenty hours without moving, as he had never rested since the accident; and

when he woke, and Dora ran up and stroked his face, it was the first time he had been seen to smile. Ever since he had been himself again, though changed from the boy of exuberant spirits, and the youth of ungovernable inclinations, into a grave, silent man, happier apparently in Dora's vehement affection than in anything else, and, at any rate, solaced, and soothed by the child's fondness and dependence upon him. This was two years ago, and no token of mental malady had since shown itself.

My poor brother Eustace! My heart yearned to have been able to comfort him. His tender nature had been all along the victim of others, and he was entirely shattered by these last miseries; an old man when little more than forty, and with heart disease so much accelerated by distress and agitation, that he did not live a month after Dora's adventure; but at least he had the comfort of seeing Harold's restoration, and being able to commit the other two to his charge, being no doubt aware that his son was at the best a poor weak being, and that Harold's

nature would rise under responsibility which would call out its generosity.

Harold had never touched liquor since the day of his child's death, nor spoken of it; but when his dying uncle begged him to watch over his young cousins, he took up the Bible that lay on the bed, and, unsolicited, took a solemn oath to taste nothing of the kind for the rest of his life.

Afterwards the three had lived on together at Boola Boola. Then had come the tidings of the inheritance supposed to be Harold's, and with the relief of one glad to make a new beginning, to have a work to do, and leave old things behind, he had taken both the others with him.

So it was true! My noble-looking Harold had those dark lines in his spectrum. Wild ungovernable strength had whirled him in mere boyhood at the beck of his passions, and when most men are entering freshly upon life, he was already saddened and sobered by sin and suffering. The stories whispered of him were more than true. I remember I cried over them as I sat

alone that evening. Eustace had not told all with the extenuations that I discovered gradually, some even then by cross-questioning, and much by the tuition of that sisterly affection that had gone out from me to Harold, and fastened on him as the one who, to me, represented family ties.

I never thought of breaking with him. No, if I had been told he might be insane that very night, it would have bound me to him the more. And when I went to bid him "Good-night" and take away Dora, and saw the massive features in their stillness light up into a good-natured smile of thanks at my inquiries, I could believe it all the less. He was lying cornerwise across the bed, with a stool beyond for his feet to rest on, and laughed a little as he said he always had to contrive thus, he never found a bed long enough; and our merriment over this seemed to render what Eustace had told me even more incongruous in one so scrupulously gentle.

That gentleness was perhaps reactionary in one who had had such lessons in keeping back

his strength. He had evidently come forth a changed man. But that vow of his—was it the binding of a worse lion than that he had fought with to-day? Yet could such things be done in the might of a merely human will? And what token was there of the higher aid being invoked? My poor Harold! I could only pray for him! Alas! did he pray for himself?

I was waked in early morning by Dora's vociferous despair at the disappearance of her big patient, and then Eustace's peremptory fretful tone was heard silencing her by explaining that Harold's hurts had become so painful that he had walked off to Mycening to have the bandages loosened.

Indeed, when we met at breakfast, Eustace seemed to think himself injured by the interruption of his slumbers by Harold's coming to him for assistance in putting on his clothes, and stared at my dismay at his having permitted such an exertion. Before long, however, we saw an unmistakable doctor's gig approaching, and from it emerged Harold and Mr. Yolland. I saw now

that he was a sturdy, hard-working-looking young man of seven or eight and twenty, with sandy hair, and an honest, open, weather-beaten face. He had a rather abrupt manner, but much more gentleman-like than that of the usual style of young Union doctors, who are divided between fine words and affectation and Sawbones roughness.

He said he had come in to enforce on us what he could not get his patient to believe—that it was madness to take such liberties with himself, while such serious wounds were so fresh; and certainly Harold did not seem to suppose a two-mile walk more of an exertion than a turn on the terrace; indeed, but for Mr. Yolland, he would have set off again after breakfast for the interrupted quest of horses at the fair. This, however, was forbidden, with a hint about even the strongest constitution not being able to defy tetanus. This made us all look grave, and submission being promised, the young doctor took his leave, saying he would come in the evening and dress the hands again for the night.

"Why did you go to that fellow?" asked

Eustace. "It is the old doctor who attends *gentlemen*; he is only the partner."

"He is good enough for me," said Harold. "I was right glad to meet him."

Then it appeared that as Harold was striding into town, half distracted with the pain of his hands, in the sunrise of that April morning, he had had the good fortune to meet Mr. Yolland just coming from the cottage where the poor little boy lay who had been injured by the lion. The fright and shock had nearly killed the mother, and the young doctor had been up all night, trying to save her, while on the floor, in a drunken sleep, lay the father, a navvy, who had expended the money lavished on the child by the spectators of the accident, in a revel at the public-house. If any were left, it was all in the brute's pocket, and the only hope of peace was when he should have drunk it up.

Eustace went off to the fair to look at horses, Harold impressing on him to do nothing final in haste; and I could see that, while proud of doing anything on his own account, he was al-

most afraid of the venture alone. Tired by his sleepless night and morning walk, Harold, when we went into the hall for Dora's lessons, lay down on the white bear-skin, let us build a pile of cushions for his head, and thanked us with "That's nice." I suppose he had never been waited on before, he smiled with such a grateful look, almost of surprise.

Have I not said that ours was a black oak-panelled hall, with a wide fireplace, a gallery and oriel window, matted, and so fitted up as to be a pleasant resort for summer days. Our lessons took place there, because I had found that my old schoolroom, out of sight and sound of everything, was such an intolerable prison to my little wild Bush girl, that she really could not learn there, since her very limited attention could only be secured, under the certainty that Harold did not leave the house without her.

He bade her let him hear how well she could read, but he was very soon fast asleep, and I was persuading her that the multiplication-table could not disturb his slumbers, when, at the

sound of horses' feet, she darted from my side, like an arrow from a bow, to the open front door, and there waved her hand in command, calling to the rider in a hushed voice, "He is asleep."

I followed, expecting to see Eustace; but the rider was instead Dermot Tracy, who in unfeigned alarm asked if *he* were seriously ill; and when I laughed and explained, he gave his horse to the groom, and came quietly enough, to satisfy Dora, into the hall with us.

There he stood transfixed, gazing at the great sleeping figure with a passion of enthusiasm in his dark-grey eyes. "Glorious!" he said. "Splendid fellow! Worthy of the deed, Lucy! It was the most plucky thing I ever saw!"

"You distinguished yourself too," I said.

"I? Why, I had a rifle. I galloped down to Grice's for mine at the first, when I saw the menagerie people were cowed. What's that to going at him alone, and mastering him too, as he had done before those idiots thought proper to yell?"

Being talked about, of course, awoke Harold;

his eyes opened, and he answered for himself greeting Dermot heartily. Only then did we understand the full history of what had happened. The lion-tamer, whose part it was to exhibit the liberty he could take with the animals, was ill, and his assistant, after much bravado as to his equal power, had felt his courage quail, and tried to renew it with drink. Thus he was in no state to perceive that he had only shot-to the bolt of the door of the cage; and his behaviour had so irritated the beast that, after so dealing with him that he lay in a most dangerous state, it had dashed out at the door in rage and terror, and, after seizing the hindmost of the flying crowd, had lain down between the shafts of the waggon, as we had seen him.

The keepers had lost their heads in the panic, and no one durst go near him. The lion-tamer had to be called from his bed, in lodgings in the town, and only came on the scene just as Dermot's rifle had finished the struggle. The master had quite seen the necessity, but was in

great despair at the loss of so valuable an animal.

"I'll share in making it good to him," said Harold.

"You? You are the last to do so. If you had only been let alone, the beast would have been captured unhurt. No, no! I settled all that, as it was I who meddled in the matter when, I believe, you could have settled him yourself."

"I don't know that," said Harold. "I was glad enough to see your rifle at his ear. But I should like to have his skin, if they would sell it."

Dermot explained that he had been bargaining for the skin, and hoped Mr. Alison would accept it from him, but here Harold's resolution won the day, much as Dermot evidently longed to lay the trophy at his feet. Poor Dermot, I could see hero-worship growing in his eyes, as they talked about horses, endlessly as men can and do talk of them, and diligent inquiries elicited from Harold what things he had done with the unbroken animal in Australia.

I went off the scene at once, but when I returned to luncheon they were at it still. And Eustace's return with two steeds for Harold's judgment renewed the subject with double vigour. Dermot gave his counsel, and did not leave Arghouse without reiterating an invitation to the cousins to come to-morrow to his cottage at Biston, to be introduced to his stables, let doctors say what they might, and Eustace was in raptures at the distinguished acquaintance he fancied he had made for himself. He had learnt something of Mr. Tracy's sporting renown, and saw himself introduced to all the hunting world of the county, not to say of England.

It gave me a great deal to consider, knowing, as I did full well, that poor Dermot's acquaintance was not likely to bring him into favour with society, even if it were not dangerous in itself. And my poor mother would not have been delighted at my day, a thing I had totally forgotten in the pleasantness of having someone to talk to; for it was six weeks since I had

spoken to anyone beyond the family, except Miss Woolmer. Besides, it was Dermot! And that was enough to move me in itself.

I think I have said that his father was an Irish landlord, who was shot at his own hall-door in his children's infancy. Lady Diana brought them back to her old neighbourhood, and there reigned over one of her brother's villages, with the greatest respect and admiration from all, and viewed as a pattern matron, widow, and parent. My mother was, I fancy, a little bit afraid of her, and never entirely at ease with her. I know I was not, but she was so "particular" about her children, that it was a great distinction to be allowed to be intimate with them, and my mother was proud of my being their licensed playfellow, when Horsmans and Stympsons were held aloof. But even in those days, when I heard the little Tracys spoken of as pattern children, I used to have an odd feeling of what it was to be behind the scenes, and know how much of their fame rested on Di. I gloried in the knowledge how much more charm-

ing the other two were than anyone guessed, who thought them models of propriety.

In truth, Dermot did not keep that reputation much longer than his petticoats. Ere long he was a pickle of the first order, equalling the sublime naughtiness of Holiday House, and was continually being sent home by private tutors, who could not manage him. All the time I had a secret conviction that, if he had been my own mother's son, she could have managed him, and he would never have even wished to do what she disapproved; but Lady Diana had no sympathy or warmth in her, and while she loved her children she fretted them, and never thawed nor unbent; and when she called in her brother's support, Dermot's nerves were driven frantic by the long harangues, and his relief was in antics which of course redoubled his offence. After he had put crackers into his uncle's boots, peppered the coachman's wig, inserted a live toad in the centre of a fortification of clear jelly at a great luncheon, and had one Christmas painted the two stone wild boars that guard the iron gates

of Erymanth Castle into startling resemblance of the porkers as displayed in butchers' shops, with a little tin pail at the snout of each, labelling each 7½d. per lb., his uncle had little more hope of him.

Dreading his father's fate for him, Lady Diana put him into the Guards, to prevent him from living in Ireland, and there he fell into all the usual temptations of his kind, so that everybody came to look on him as a black sheep, and all the time I knew that, if any one had taken him in the right way, he might have been kept out of it. Why there was one talk that he and I had at a picnic on Kalydon Moor, which showed me how hopeless he was of ever really pleasing or satisfying his mother without being, what he could never be, like his uncle in his youth, and how knowing that I cared really might make a difference to him. But mamma and Lady Diana were both very much vexed about that talk; mamma was angry with me; and when Dermot, in a poetical game a little after, sent me some verses—well, with a little more blarney and ten-

derness than the case required—there was a real uproar about them. Di showed them to her mother, who apologised in her lofty way for my having been insulted. Oh! how angry it did make me; and mamma absolutely cried about it. It seems foolish to say so, but if they would have let us alone I could have done something towards inducing him to keep straight, whereas the way he was treated by his mother and Di only made him worse. Poor mamma! I don't wonder at her, when even his own mother and uncle would not stand up for him; but I knew, whenever we met afterwards at ball or party, that it was pain and grief to her for me to speak a word to him, and that she thought me wrong to exchange anything beyond bare civility. He was vexed, too, and did not try; and we heard worse and worse of him, especially when he went over to his place in Ireland.

Then came the Crimean war, and all the chances of showing what I knew he really was; but at the Alma he was wounded, not very dangerously, but just touching his lungs, and

after a long illness in London, the doctors said he must not go back to Sebastopol, for to serve in the trenches would be certain death to him. He wanted to go back all the same, and had an instinct that it would be better for him, but his mother and uncle prevented him and made him sell out, and after that, when he had nothing to do—oh! there's no need to think of it.

In the course of this last year he had taken the shooting of Kalydon Moor, and a house with it, with immense stables, which one of the Horsmans had made for his hunters, and had ruined himself and died. He had not quarrelled with his mother—indeed nobody could quarrel with Dermot—and he used to go over to see her, but he would not live at home, and since he had been at Biston I had never once met him till I saw him run up to attack the lion, the only man in all the fair except Harold who had courage to do so! I could not help my heart bounding at the thought, and afterwards enjoying the talk with him that I could not help. But then it made me feel undutiful to my dear mother, and

then there was the further difficulty to be faced. It would have been all very well to live with my nephews if we had been in a desert island, but I could not expect them not to make friends of their own; and if mine chose to drop me, how would it be for me, at my age, all alone in the house?

Harold was forced to confess that he had done too much that first day. His hand was inflamed, and pain and weariness forbade all thought of spending a long day from home; and, besides, there arrived letters by the morning's post which left grave lines on his brow.

So Eustace drove off alone, a good deal elated at such an expedition, and I took Harold to my own little sitting-room, so despised by Dora, for the convenience of bathing the flesh wounds on the right hand, which, though really the least injured, was a much greater torment than the broken fingers, and had allowed him very little sleep.

It was the first time he had been in the room, and on the chimney-piece stood open a

miniature-case containing a portrait, by Thorburn, of my little brother Percy, in loose brown holland. Harold started as he came in, and exclaimed, "Where did that come from?" I told him, and he exclaimed, "Shut it up, please," and sat down with his back to it, resigning his hand to me, and thanking me warmly when the fomentation brought some relief, and when I asked if I could do any more for him he seemed undecided, extracted some letters from his pocket with his two-fifths of a hand, and sent Dora to his room for his writing-case. I offered to write anything for him, but he said, "Let me try," and then endeavoured; but he found that not only did the effort hurt him unbearably, but that he could not guide the pen for more than a word or two; so he consented to make use of me, saying, however, "Dora, it is no use your staying in; you had better go out."

Dora, of course, wanted to stay; but I devised that she should go, under the escort of one of the maids, to carry some broth to the wounded boy, an expedition which would last her some

time, and which Harold enforced with all his might as a personal favour, till she complied.

"Thank you," said Harold; "you see this must be done at once, or we shall have them coming over here."

He gave me the sheet he had begun with "Dear Mother," and went on dictating. It was not at all after Julius Cæsar's fashion of dictating. He sat with his eyes on his own letter, and uttered one brief but ponderous sentence after another, each complete in all its parts, and quite unhesitating, though slowly uttered. I gathered it up, wrote it down, said "Well," and waited for more in silence, till, after I had looked at him once or twice to see whether he were asleep or in a reverie, another such sentence followed, and I began to know him very much better.

After saying "My hands have been lamed for a few days, and my aunt is so good as to write for me," he went on to say, in forcible and not very affectionate terms, that "Smith must not think of coming home; Eustace could do nothing for him there, but as long as the family

remained at Nelson their allowance should be increased by one hundred pounds a year." I filled up an order, which he signed on a Sydney bank for the first quarter. "It must not be more," he said, as he told me the sum, "or they will be taking their passage with it."

"No more?" I asked, when he prepared to conclude this short letter.

"No. Smith reads all her letters."

"That is very hard on you."

"She meant to do well for me, but it was a great mistake. If Smith comes home to prey upon Eustace, it will be a bad business."

"But he has no claim on Eustace, whatever he may think he has on you."

"He is more likely to come now. He knows he can get nothing out of me—" Then, as I looked at the order, he added, "Beyond my mother's rights. Poor mother!"

I found that the schoolmaster had been induced to marry Alice Alison in the expectation that her share in the proceeds of Boola Boola would be much larger than it proved to be. He

had fawned on the two Eustaces, and obtained all he could from the elder, but, going too far at last, had been detected by the Sydney bank in what amounted to an embezzlement. Prosecution was waived, and he was assisted to leave Australia and make a fresh start in New Zealand, whence he had never ceased to endeavour to gain whatever he could from Boola Boola. He could twist Eustace round his finger, and Harold, though loathing and despising him, would do anything for his mother, but was resolved, for Eustace's sake, to keep them at a distance, as could only be done by never allowing them a sufficient sum at once to obtain a passage home, and he knew the habits of Smith and his sons too well to expect them to save it. In fact, the letter before him, which he ended by giving me to read, had been written by the poor woman at her husband's dictation, in the belief that Harold was the heir, to demand their passage-money from him, and that there was a sad little postscript put in afterwards, unknown to her tyrant. "My boy, don't do it. It will be much better

for you not;" and, brave woman as she was, she added no entreaty that his refusal might be softened. I asked if she had had any more children. "No, happily," was Harold's answer. "If I might only wring that fellow's neck, I could take care of her." In fact, I should think, when he wanted to come within Harold's grasp, he hardly knew what he asked.

This finished, it appeared that Harold wanted to have a letter finished to Prometesky which he had begun some days before. This astonished me more, both by the questions Prometesky had been asking, and the answers Harold was returning, as to the state of the country and the condition of the people. They did much to relieve my mind of the fears I had sometimes entertained of Harold's being a ferocious demagogue incited thereto by his friend.

Who would have thought there was so much depth in his brain? He ended by saying, "Eustace takes kindly to his new position, and is gone to-day to see Mr. Tracy, nephew to Lord Erymanth,

but who does not appear disposed to carry on the same hostility to us."

I exclaimed at his having said nothing of the lion either to his mother or his friend, and asked leave to add it, which he did not refuse, though saying there was no use in it, and that he wanted me to do one thing more for him—namely, to write to his agent in Sydney an order which he signed for the transmission of some money to England. He had learnt from Mr. Yolland that morning that the "Dragon's Head" and some adjoining houses at Mycening were for sale, and that the purchaser could have immediate possession.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Shut it up."

"You can't do much good by shutting up one public-house."

"Eustace will do the same with those on his property."

"I am very much afraid your crusade will not succeed, unless you can put something better into people's minds."

"I shall see about that," he answered, thinking, I believe, that I was going to suggest religion, from all mention of which he shrank, as if it touched a wound. "Smith talked of religion," he once said, with a shudder. Besides, he was a creature in the superabundance of all human faculties to whom their exercise seemed for a time all-sufficient, and the dark shade of horror and remorse in the depths of his heart made him unwilling to look back or think. At any rate, he silenced me on that head; but, thinking, perhaps, that he had been unkindly blunt, he resumed, "There is no risk for Eustace in this acquaintance?"

In spite of the pang that smote me, I felt that this was the only time I might have for that word of warning which seemed incumbent on me. "I do not think there is danger in his going to-day, but it does seem right to tell you that poor Dermot Tracy is said to be very extravagant, and to lead a wild life. And Harold, though I have known him all my life, I have been thinking that it will not do for me to be

here, if this should become a resort of the set of people he has made friends of."

Harold answered in his steady, grave way, "I see. But, Lucy, I suppose none of them have been so bad as I have been?"—rather as if he were wondering over the matter.

"But you belong to me," I answered, and I saw a look of real pleasure meet my smile.

"I wish I knew what was best for Eustace," he said, after a few more moments' thought. "Is it doing him harm for me to be here? I could go back to New South Wales at once, only in some ways I don't think the old fellow could get on without me, till he is more used to it all, and in safe hands."

I had no hesitation in answering that Eustace would be much worse off without his cousin, and that the treatment we were receiving was chiefly on account of the fathers of both, not personal to Harold.

"Then you think it would not help him for me to leave him?"

"I think he is far more likely to live it down with you to help him."

"But, Lucy, are you being given up by all your friends for our sakes? We did not know it meant that when we asked you to stay with us!"

"No more did I. But don't be uneasy about that, Harold dear. Don't you think one's own flesh and blood is more than all such friends?"

"I should not have thought two fellows like us could have been worth much to you," said Harold, gravely pondering. "That pretty little thing who was with you the night we came; she has never been here again. Don't you miss her?"

"It is not her fault," I said. "Besides, nothing is like the tie of blood."

I shall never forget the look that was in Harold's eyes. I was standing over him, putting some fresh warm water on his hand. He put back his head and looked up earnestly in my face, as if to see whether I meant it, then said, "We are very thankful to you for thinking so."

I could not help bending and touching his

forehead with my lips. His eyes glistened and twinkled, but he said nothing for a little space, and then it was, "If any one like you had been out there——"

I don't think I ever had a compliment that gave me more pleasure, for there was somehow an infinite sense of meaning in whatever Harold said, however short it might be, as if his words had as much force in them as his muscles.

After a good deal more of silent sponging and some knitting of his brows, either from thought or from pain, he said, "Then, as I understand, you cast in your lot with us, and give us the blessing of your presence and care of poor little Dora, to help to set Eustace in his proper place in society. I see then that it is your due that we should bring no one here of whom you do not fully approve."

"It is not only a matter of approval," I explained. "There are many with whom I could freely associate in general society, or if I had any lady with me, whom I ought not to have constantly here with only you two."

"England is different from the Bush," he answered, and meditated for ten minutes more, for no doubt it was the Australian practice to offer free quarters to all comers without Mrs. Grundy, who had hardly yet had her free passage. My heart smote me lest I were acting unkindly for her sake, but then surely I was saving my allegiance to my dead mother, and while I was still thinking it over, Harold said:

"You are more to us than any one could be; Eustace shall see the thing rightly, and while you are good enough to make this our home, I promise you that no one shall be invited here but as you like."

It was a bold promise, especially as it turned out that Eustace had been making large invitations to the Arghouse fishing to Dermot Tracy and some officer friends whom he had found at Biston, and who seemed to have made themselves very pleasant. I bade Harold never mind about that sort of invitation, as it need not affect Dora or me, since we could keep out of the way of it, being unconcerned with gentlemen's parties.

Miss Woolmer said I had done right, and gave us a general invitation to spend the evening with her if Eustace wished to entertain his friends, though she hinted, "Don't be too ready to leave the coast clear. Remember that you are a wholesome check."

CHAPTER III.

THE "DRAGON'S HEAD."

HAROLD'S right hand healed quickly, and was free in a few days, but the left had to be kept for some time in a sling, and be daily attended to, though he heeded it but little, walking miles to look at horses and to try them, for he could manage them perfectly with one hand, and in this way he saw a good deal of Dermot Tracy, who exerted himself to find a horse to carry the mighty frame.

The catastrophe at the fair had gained him two friends, entirely unlike one another—Dermot, who thenceforward viewed him with unvarying hero-worship, and accepted Eustace as his appendage; and George Yolland, the very reverse of all

Dermot's high-bred form of Irishism, and careless, easy self-indulgence.

A rough-hewn, rugged young man, intensely in earnest, and therefore neither popular nor successful was that young partner of Dr. Kingston. Had Harold been squire, the resignation of the patient into his hands would have been less facile; but as a mere Australian visitor, he was no prize, and might follow his own taste if he preferred the practitioner to whom club, cottage, and union patients were abandoned.

By him Harold was let into those secrets of the lower stratum of society he had longed to understand. Attention to the poor boy who had been torn by the lion brought him into the great village of workmen's huts, that had risen up round the Hydriot clay works on the Lerne.

These had been set up by a company about eighteen years before, much against all our wills. With Lord Erymanth at our head, we had opposed with all our might the breaking up of the beautiful moorland that ran right down into Mycening, and the defilement of our pure and rapid Lerne; but

modern progress had been too strong for us. Huge brick inclosures with unpleasant smoky chimneys had arisen, and around them a whole colony of bare, ugly little houses, filled with squalid women and children, little the better for the men's wages when they were high, and now that the Company was in a languishing state, miserable beyond description. We county people had simply viewed ourselves as the injured parties by this importation, bemoaned the ugliness of the erections, were furious at the interruptions to our country walks, prophesied the total collapse of the Company, and never suspected that we had any duties towards the potters. The works were lingering on, only just not perishing; the wages that the men did get, such as they were, went in drink; the town in that quarter was really unsafe in the evening; and the most ardent hope of all the neighbourhood was, that the total ruin constantly expected would lead to the migration of all the wretched population.

Mr. Yolland, who attended most of their sicknesses, used to tell fearful things of the

misery, vice, and hardness, and did acts of almost heroic kindness among them, which did not seem consistent with what, to my grief and dismay, was reported of this chosen companion of Harold—that physical science had conducted him into materialism. The chief comfort I had was that Miss Woolmer liked him and opened her house to him. She was one of the large-hearted women who can see the good through the evil, and was interested by contact with all phases of thought; and, moreover, the lad should not be lost for want of the *entrée* to something like a home, because the upper crust of Mycening considered him as "only Dr. Kingston's partner," and the Kingstons themselves had the sort of sense that he was too much for them which makes a spider dislike to have a bluebottle in his web.

She was interested, too, rather sadly in the crusade without the cross that the two young men were trying to undertake against the wretchedness of those potters.

It was much in their favour that the land-

lord, who was also the owner of the "Dragon's Head," was invited to join a brother in America without loss of time, and was ready to sell and give immediate possession; so that Harry actually owned it in a fortnight from first hearing of the offer, having, of course, given a heavy price for it.

The evening it came into his possession he went down, and, standing at the door, tried to explain why he had closed it, and why he could not bear to see its frequenters spending their wages on degrading themselves and making their homes miserable. In no mood for a temperance harangue, the men drowned, or would have drowned aught but his short incisive sentences, in clamours for their beer, and one big bully pushed forward to attack him. His left hand was still in the sling, but with the other he caught hold of the fellow by the collar, and swung him over the side of the stone steps as helpless as a puppy dog, shaking him till his teeth chattered ere setting him on his feet. "If you wish for any more," he said,

"we'll have it out as soon as this hand is well."

That made them cheer him, and the fellow slunk away; while Harold, having gained a hearing, told them that he meant to make the former "Dragon's Head" a place where they might smoke, read the papers, play games, and have any refreshment such as coffee, tea, or ginger-beer, at which they hissed, and only one or two observed, "I am sure you wishes us well, sir."

It was a good-sized house, and he meant to put in a steady couple to keep it, giving up two upper rooms to make a laboratory for Mr. Yolland, whose soul was much set on experiments for which his lodgings gave him no space; but the very day when Harold opened his coffee-rooms, as he went down the street, an "Original Dragon's Head" and a "Genuine Dragon's Head" grinned defiance at him, in the full glory of teeth, fiery breath, and gilded scales, on the other side of the way. I believe they had been beershops before; but, be that as it may, they

devoured quite as many as their predecessor, and though newspapers and draught-boards lay all about the place, they attracted only two clients!

And the intended closing of all the beer-houses on the Arghouse property, except the time-honoured "Blue Boar" on the village green, seemed likely to have the same effect; for the notices to their holders, grimly resisted by Bullock, seemed only to cause dozens of householders to represent the absolute need of such houses whenever they did not belong to us.

"To destroy one is to produce two," sighed Harold.

"There's nothing to be done but to strike at the root," I said.

"What's that?" said Harold.

"Man's evil propensities," I said.

"Humph," said Harold. "If I could manage the works now! They say the shares are to be had for an old song."

"Oh, Harry, *don't* have anything to do with them," I entreated. "They have ruined every

creature who has meddled with them, and done unmitigated mischief."

Harold made no answer, but the next day he was greatly stimulated by a letter from Prometesky, part of which he read to me, in its perfect English, yet foreign idiom.

"I long to hear of the field of combat we had to quit, because one party was too stolid, the other too ardent. I see it all before me with the two new champions freshly girded for the strife, but a peaceful strife, my friend. Let our experience be at least profitable to you, and let it be a peaceful contention of emulation such as is alone suited to that insular nation which finds its strongest stimulus in domestic comfort and wealth. Apropos, has some one pursued a small discovery of mine, that, had I not been a stranger of a proscribed nation, and had not your English earl and the esquires been hostile to all save the hereditary plough, might have found employment for thousands and prevented the history of your fathers and of myself? That bed of argillaceous deposit around the

course of your Lerne, which I found to be of the same quality as the porcelain clay of Meissen, does it still merely bear a few scanty blades of corn, or is its value appreciated, and is it occupying hundreds of those who starved and were discontented, to the great surprise of their respectable landlords? I wonder whether a few little figures that I modelled in the clay for specimens, and baked in my hostess's oven, are still in existence. The forms of clay were there. Alas! I asked in vain of your English magnates for the fire from heaven to animate the earth, or rather I would have brought it, and I suffered."

It was amusing to see how much delighted honest Harold was with this letter, and how much honoured he seemed by his dear old Prometesky having spent so much time and thought upon writing to him. It fired him with doubled ardour to investigate the Hydriot Company, and he could hardly wait till a reasonable hour the next day. Then he took Eustace down with him and returned quite talkative (for him) with the discoveries he had made, from one of the

oldest workmen who had become disabled from the damp of working in the clay.

The Company had been set up by a clever speculating young attorney, but the old man remembered that "that there foreign gentleman, the same as was sent to foreign parts with the poor young squires," was "always a-puddling about in it; and they did say as how he tried to get my lord, and Squire Horsman, and Squire Stympson to see to setting up summut there; but they wasn't never for 'speriments, and there was no more talk of it not till that there young Crabbe got hold, they say, of some little images as he had made, and never rested till he had got up the Company, and begun the works, having drawn in by his enthusiasm half the tradesmen and a few of the gentlemen of the place."

Three years of success; then came a bad manager; young Crabbe struggled in vain to set things right, broke down, and died of the struggle; and ever since the unhappy affair had lingered on, starving its workmen, and just keeping alive by making common garden pots and

pans and drain-tiles. Most people who could had sold out of it, thanking the Limited Liabilities for its doing them no further harm; and the small remnant only hung on because no one could be found to give them even the absurdly small amount that was still said to be the value of their shares.

That they would find now Harold had fallen in with young Yolland, who had been singing the old song, first of Prometesky, then of Crabbe, and had made him listen to it. Five pounds would now buy a share that used to be worth a hundred, and that with thanks from the seller that he got anything from what had long ceased to pay the ghost of a dividend. And loose cash was not scarce with Harold; he was able to buy up an amount which perfectly terrified me, and made me augur that the Hydriot would swallow all Boola Boola, and more too; and as to Mr. Yolland's promises of improvements, no one, after past experience, could believe in them.

"Now, Harold, you know nothing of all this intricate business; and as to these chemical

agencies, I am sure you know nothing about them."

"I shall learn."

"You will only be taken in," I went on in my character as good aunt, "and utterly ruined."

"No matter if I am."

"Only please, at least, don't drag in Eustace and Arghouse."

"Eustace will only have five shares standing in his name to enable him to be chairman."

"Five too many! Harold! I cannot see why you involve yourself in all this. You are well off! You don't care for these foolish hopes of gain."

"I can't see things go so stupidly to wrack."

The truth was that he saw in it a continuation of Prometesky's work and his father's, so expostulations were vain. He had been thoroughly bitten, and was the more excited at finding that Dermot and Viola Tracy were both shareholders. Their father had been a believer in Crabbe, and

had taken a good many shares, and these had been divided between them at his death. They could not be sold till they were of age, and by the time Dermot was twenty-one, no one would buy them; and now, when they were recalled to his mind, he would gladly have made Harold a present of them, but Harold would not even buy them; he declared that he wanted Dermot's vote, as a shareholder, to help in the majority; and, in fact, the effective male shareholders on the spot were only just sufficient to furnish directors. Mr. Yolland bought two shares that he might have a voice; Eustace was voted into the chair, and the minority was left to consist of the greatly-soured representative of the original Crabbe, and one other tradesman, who held on for the sake, as it seemed, of maintaining adherence to the red pots and pans, as, at any rate, risking nothing.

Of course I hated and dreaded it all, and it was only by that power which made it so hard to say nay to Harold, that he got me down to look at the very lair of the Hydriot Company.

It was a melancholy place; the buildings were so much larger, and the apparatus so much more elaborate than there was any use for; and there were so few workmen, and those so unhealthy and sinister-looking.

I remember the great red central chimney with underground furnaces all round, which opened like the fiery graves where Dante placed the bad Popes; and how dreadfully afraid I was that Dora would tumble into one of them, so that I was glad to see her held fast by the fascination of the never-superseded potter and his wheel fashioning the clay, while Mr. Yolland discoursed and Harold muttered assents to some wonderful scheme that was to economise fuel—the rock on which this furnace had split.

It has been explained to me over and over again, and I never did more than understand it for one moment, and if I *did* recollect all about it, like a scientific dialogue, nobody would thank me for putting it in here, so it will be enough to say that it sounded to me very bewildering and horribly dangerous, not so much to the body

as to the pocket, and I thought the Hydriot bade fair to devour Boola Boola and Harold, if not Arghouse and Eustace into the bargain.

They meant to have a Staffordshire man down to act as foreman and put things on a better footing.

"I'll write to my brother to send one," said Mr. Yolland. "He's a curate in the Potteries; has a wonderful turn for this sort of thing."

"Have you a brother a clergyman?" I said, rather surprised, and to fill up Harold's silence.

"Yes, my brother Ben. It's his first curacy, and his two years are all but up. I don't know if he will stay on. He's a right down jolly good fellow is Ben, and I wish he would come down here."

Neither of us echoed the wish. Harold had no turn for clergymen after the specimen of Mr. Smith; and Mr. Yolland, though I could specify nothing against him but that he was rough and easy, had offended me by joining us, when I wanted Harold all to myself. Besides, was he not deluding my nephews into this horrid Hy-

driot Company, of which they would be the certain victims?

The Staffordshire man came, and the former workmen looked very bitter on him. After a meeting, in which the minority made many vehement objections, Eustace addressed the workmen in the yards—that is to say, he thought he did; but Harold and Mr. Yolland made his meaning more apparent. A venture in finer workmanship, imitating Etruscan ware, was to be made, and, if successful, would much increase trade and profits, and a rise in wages was offered to such as could undertake the workmanship. Moreover, it was held out to them that they might become the purchasers of shares or half shares at the market price, and thus have an interest in the concern, whereat they sneered as at some new dodge of the Company for taking them in. It did not seem to me that much was done, save making Harry pore over books and accounts, and run his hands through his hair, till his thick curls stood up in all directions.

And Miss Woolmer herself was sorry. She

remembered the old story—nay, she had one of Prometesky's own figures modelled in terra cotta, defective, of course, as a work of art, but with that fire that genius can breathe into the imperfect. She believed it had been meant for the Hope of Poland. Alas! the very name reminded one of the old word for despair, "Wanhope." But Harold admired it greatly, and both he and George Yolland seemed to find inspiration in it.

But one summer evening, when the young men were walking up and down the garden, smoking, we heard something that caused us to look round for a thunder-cloud, though none could be seen in the clear sky, and some quarter of an hour after, Richardson hurried out to us with the tidings, "I beg your pardon, sir, but there is a person come up to say there has been an explosion at the Hydriot works."

"Impossible!" said Harold. "There's nothing to explode!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it is Mr. Yolland they say has blowed himself up with his experi-

ments, and all the old "Dragon's Head" in Lerne Street, and he is buried under the ruins. It is all one mass of ruin, sir, and he under it."

Harold rushed off, without further word or query, and Eustace after him, and I had almost to fight to hold back Dora, and should hardly have succeeded if the two had not disappeared so swiftly that she could not hope to come up with them.

I let her put on her things and come down with me to the lodge-gate to watch. I was afraid to go any farther, and there we waited, without even the relief of a report, till we had heard the great clock strike quarter after quarter, and were expecting it to strike eleven, when steps came near at last, and Eustace opened the gate. We threw ourselves upon him, and he cried out with surprise, then said, "He is alive!"

"Who! Harold?"

"Harold! Nonsense. What should be the matter with Harold? But he is going to stay with him—Yolland I mean—for the night! It was all his confounded experiments. It was very

well that I went down—nothing was being done without a head to direct, but they always know what to be at when *I* come among them."

No one there knew the cause of the accident, except that it had taken place in Mr. Yolland's laboratory, where he had been trying experiments. The house itself had been violently shattered, and those nearest had suffered considerably. Happily, it stood in a yard of its own, so that none adjoined it, and though the fronts of the two opposite "Dragon's Heads" had broken windows and torn doors, no person within them had been more than stunned and bruised. But the former "Dragon's Head" itself had become a mere pile of stones, bricks, and timbers. The old couple in charge had happily been out, and stood in dismay over the heap, which Harold and a few of the men were trying to remove, in the dismal search for Mr. Yolland and the boy he employed to assist him. The boy was found first, fearfully burnt about the face and hands, but protected from being crushed by the boards which had fallen slantwise over him. And under another beam, which

guarded his head, but rested on his leg, lay young Yolland.

Harold's strength had raised the beam, and he was drawn out. He revived as the night air blew on his face, looked up as Harold lifted him, said, "I have it," and fainted the next moment. They had taken him to his lodgings, where Dr. Kingston had set the broken leg and bound the damaged rib, but could not yet pronounce on the other injuries, and Harold had taken on himself the watch for the night.

The explanation that we all held by was, that the damage was caused by an officious act of the assistant, who, perceiving that it was growing dark, fired a match, and began to light the gas at the critical moment of the experiment, by which the means of obtaining the utmost heat at the smallest expense of fuel was to be attained. It was one of those senseless acts that no one would have thought of forbidding; and though the boy, on recovering his senses, owned that the last thing he remembered was getting the matches and Mr. Yolland shouting to stop him, there were many

who never would believe anything but that it was blundering of his, and that he was a dangerous and mischievous person to have in the town.

Harold came home for a little while just as we were having breakfast, to bring a report that his patient had had a much quieter night than he expected, and to say that he had telegraphed for the brother and wanted Eustace to meet him at the station. The landlady was sitting with the patient now, and Harold had come home for ice, strawberries, and, above all, to ask for help in nursing, for the landlady could not, and would not, do much. I mentioned a motherly woman as, perhaps, likely to be useful, but Harold said, "I could do best with Dora."

He had so far learnt that it was not the Bush as not to expect me to offer, and was quite unprepared for the fire that Eustace and I opened on him as to the impossibility of his request. "Miss Alison, *my* sister," as Eustace said, "going down to a little, common, general practitioner to wait on him;" while I confined

myself to "It won't do at all, Harold," and promised to hunt up the woman and to send her to his aid. But when I had seen her, arranged my housekeeping affairs, and called Dora to lessons, she was nowhere to be found.

"Then she has gone after Harold!" indignantly exclaimed Eustace. "It is too bad! I declare I will put a stop to it! To have *my* sister demeaning herself to put herself in such a situation for a little Union doctor!"

I laughed, and observed that no great harm was done with so small a person, only I could not think what use Harold could make of her; at which Eustace was no less surprised, for a girl of eight or nine was of no small value in the Bush, and he said Dora had been most helpful in the care of her father. But his dignity was so much outraged that he talked big of going to bring her home—only he did not go. I was a little wounded at Harold having taken her in the face of my opposition, but I found that that had not been the case, for Eustace had walked to the lodge with him, and she had

rushed after and joined him after he was in the town. And at luncheon Eustace fell on me with entreaties that I would come with him and help him meet "this parson," whom he seemed to dread unreasonably, as, in fact, he always did shrink from doing anything alone when he could get a helper. I thought this would be, at least, as queer as Dora's nursing of the other brother; but it seemed so hard for the poor man, coming down in his anxiety, to be met by Eustace either in his vague or his supercilious mood, that I consented at last, so that he might have someone of common sense, and walked down with him.

We could not doubt which was the right passenger, when a young clergyman, almost as rough-looking as his brother, and as much bearded, but black where he was yellow, sprang out of a second-class with anxious looks. It was I who said at one breath, "There he is! Speak to him, Eustace! Mr. Yolland—he is better—he will do well——"

"Thank—thank you——" And the hat was

pushed back, with a long breath; then, as he only had a little black bag to look after, we all walked together to the lodgings, while the poor man looked bewildered and unrealising under Eustace's incoherent history of the accident—a far more conjectural and confused story than it became afterwards.

I waited till Harold came down with Dora; and to my "How could you?" and Eustace's more severe and angry blame, she replied, "He wanted me; so of course I went."

Harold said not a word in defence of her or of himself; but when I asked whether she had been of any use, he said, smiling affectionately at her, "Wasn't she?"

Then we went and looked at the shattered houses, and Harold showed us where he had drawn out his poor friend, answering the aggrieved owners opposite that there would be an inquiry, and means would be found for compensation.

And when I said, "It is a bad beginning for the Hydriot plans!" he answered, "I don't

know that," and stood looking at the ruins of his "Dragon's Head" in a sort of brown study, till we grew impatient, and dragged him home.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WRATH OF DIANA.

HAROLD did not like clergymen. "Smith was a clergyman," he said, with an expressive look; and while George Yolland had his brother and the nurse I had sent, he merely made daily inquiries, and sometimes sat an hour with his friend.

Mr. Crosse's curate had kindred in Staffordshire, and offered to exchange a couple of Sundays with Mr. Benjamin Yolland, and this resulted in the visitor being discovered to have a fine voice and a great power of preaching, and as he was just leaving his present parish, this ended in Mr. Crosse begging him to remain permanently, not much to Harold's gratification;

but the two brothers were all left of their family, and, different as their opinions were, they were all in all to each other.

The agreement with Mr. Crosse would hardly have been made, had the brothers known all that was coming. George Yolland was in a strange stupefied state for the first day or two, owing, it was thought, to the effects of the gas; but he revived into the irritable state of crankiness which could not submit in prudent patience to Dr. Kingston's dicta, but argued, and insisted on his own treatment of himself, and his own theory of the accident, till he as good as told the doctor that he was an old woman. Whether it were in consequence or not, I don't know, but as soon as Dr. Kingston could persuade himself that a shock would do no harm, he wrote a polite letter explaining that the unfortunate occurrence from which Mr. Yolland was suffering had so destroyed the confidence of his patients, that he felt it due to them to take steps to dissolve the partnership.

Perhaps it was no wonder. Such things were

told and believed, that those who had never yet been attended by George Yolland believed him a wild and destructive theorist. Miss Avice Stympson asked Miss Woolmer how she could sleep in her bed when she knew he was in the town, and the most astonishing stories of his practice were current, of which I think the mildest was, that he had pulled out all a poor girl's teeth for the sake of selling them to a London dentist, and that, when in a state of intoxication, he had cut off a man's hand, because he had a splinter in his finger.

However, the effect was, that Harold summoned a special meeting of the shareholders, the same being nearly identical with the Directors of the Hydriot Company, and these contrived to get George Yolland, Esquire, appointed chemist and manager of the works, with a salary of £70 per annum, to be increased by a percentage on the sales! Crabbe objected vehemently, but was in the minority. The greater number were thoroughly believers in the discovery made on that unlucky night, or else were led away by that

force of Harold's, which was almost as irresistible by mind, as by matter. But the tidings were received with horror by the town. Three nervous old ladies who lived near the Lerne gave notice to quit, and many declared that it was an indictable offence.

Small as the salary was, it was more than young Yolland was clearing by his connection with Dr. Kingston; and as he would have to spare himself during the next few months, and could not without danger undertake the exertions of a wide field of Union practice, the offer was quite worth his acceptance. Moreover, he had the enthusiasm of a practical chemist, and would willingly have starved to see his invention carried out, so he received the appointment with the gruff gratitude that best suited Harold; and he and his brother were to have rooms in the late "Dragon's Head," so soon as it should have been rebuilt on improved principles, with a workman's hall below, and a great court for the children to play in by day and the lads in the evening.

Of the clerical Yolland we saw and heard very little. Harold was much relieved to find that even before his brother could move beyond the sofa, he was always out all day, for though he had never spoken a word that sounded official, Harold had an irrational antipathy to his black attire. Nor did I hear him preach, except by accident, for Arghouse chapelry was in the beat of the other curate, and in the afternoon, when I went to Mycening old church, he had persuaded Mr. Crosse to let him begin what was then a great innovation—a children's service, with open doors, in the National School-room. Miss Woolmer advised me to try the effect of this upon Dora, whose Sundays were a constant perplexity and reproach to me, since she always ran away into the plantations or went with Harold to see the horses; and if we did succeed in dragging her to church, there behaved in the most unedifying manner.

"I don't like the principle of cutting religion down for children," said my old friend. "They ought to be taught to think it a favour to be

admitted to grown-up people's services, and learn to follow them, instead of having everything made to please them. It is the sugar-plum system, and so I told Mr. Ben, but he says you must catch wild heathens with sugar; and as I am afraid your poor child is not much better, you had better try the experiment."

I did try it, and the metrical litany and the hymns happily took Dora's fancy, so that she submitted to accompany me whenever Harold was to sit with George Yolland, and would not take her.

One afternoon, when I was not well, I was going to send her with Colman, and Harold coming in upon her tempest of resistance, and trying to hush it, she declared that she would only go if he did, and to my amazement he yielded and she led him off in her chains.

He made no comment, but on the next Sunday I found him pocketing an immense parcel of sweets. He walked into the town with us, and when I expected him to turn off to his friend's lodging, he said, "Lucy, if you prefer the

old church, I'll take Dora to the school. I like the little monkeys."

He went, and he went again and again, towering among the pigmies in the great room, kneeling when they knelt, adding his deep bass to the curate's in their songs, responding with them, picking up the sleepy and fretful to sit on his knee during the little discourse and the catechising; and then, outside the door, solacing himself and them with a grand distribution of ginger-bread and all other dainty cakes, especially presenting solid plum buns, and even mutton pies, where there were pinched looks and pale faces.

It was delightful, I have been told, to see him sitting on the low wall with as many children as possible scrambling over him, or sometimes standing up, holding a prize above his head, to be scrambled for by the lesser urchins. It had the effect of rendering this a highly popular service, and the curate was wise enough not to interfere with this anomalous conclusion to the service, but to perceive that it might both bless him that gave and those that took.

In the early part of the autumn, one of the little members of the congregation died, and was buried just after the school service. Harold did not know of it, or I do not think he would have been present, for he shrank from whatever renewed the terrible agony of that dark time in Australia.

But the devotions in the school were full of the thought, the metrical litany was one specially adapted to the occasion, so was the brief address, which dwelt vividly, in what some might have called too realising a strain, upon the glories and the joys of innocents in Paradise. And, above all, the hymns had been chosen with special purpose, to tell of those who—

> For ever and for ever
> Are clad in robes of white.

I knew nothing of all this, but when I came home from my own church, and went to my own sitting-room, I was startled to find Harold there, leaning over the table, with that miniature of little Percy, which, two months before, he had

bidden me shut up, open before him, and the tears streaming down his face.

In great confusion he muttered, "I beg your pardon," and fled away, dashing his handkerchief over his face. I asked Dora about it, but she would tell nothing; I believe she was half ashamed, half jealous, but it came round through Miss Woolmer, how throughout the address Harold had sat with his eyes fixed on the preacher, and one tear after another gathering in his eyes. And when the concluding hymn was sung—one specially on the joys of Paradise—he leant his forehead against the wall, and could hardly suppress his sobs. When all was over, he handed his bag of sweets to one of the Sunday-school teachers, muttering "Give them," and strode home.

From that time I believe there never was a day that he did not come to my sitting-room to gaze at little Percy. He chose the time when I was least likely to be there, and I knew it well enough to take care that the coast should be left clear for him. I do believe that, ill-taught and

unheeding as the poor dear fellow had been, that service was the first thing that had borne in upon him any sense that his children were actually existing, and in joy and bliss; and that when he had once thus hearkened to the idea, that load of anguish, which made him wince at the least recollection of them, was taken off. It was not his nature to speak in the freshness of emotion, and, after a time, there was a seal upon his feelings; but there was an intermediate period when he sometimes came for sympathy, but that was so new a thing to him that he did not quite know how to seek it.

It was the next Sunday evening that I came into my room at a time I did not expect him to be there, just as it was getting dark, that he seemed to feel some explanation due. "This picture," he said, "it is so like my poor little chap."

Then he asked me how old Percy had been when it was taken; and then I found myself listening, as he leant against the mantelpiece, to a minute description of poor little Ambrose, all

the words he could say, his baby plays, and his ways of welcoming and clinging to his father, even to the very last, when he moaned if anyone tried to take him out of Harold's arms. It seemed as though the dark shadow and the keen sting had somehow been taken away by the assurance that the child might be thought of full of enjoyment; and certainly, from that time, the peculiar sadness of Harold's countenance diminished. It was always grave, but the air of oppression went away.

I said something about meeting the child again, to which Harold replied, "You will, may be."

"And you, Harold." And as he shook his head, and said something about good people, I added, "It would break my heart to think you would not."

That made him half smile in his strange, sad way, and say, "Thank you, Lucy;" then add, "But it's no use thinking about it; I'm not that sort."

"But you are, but you are, Harold!" I remem-

ber crying out with tears. "God has made you to be nobler, and greater, and better than any of us, if you only would——"

"Too late," he said. "After all I have been, and all I have done——"

"Too late! Harry—with a whole lifetime before you to do God real, strong service in?"

"It won't ever cancel that——"

I tried to tell him what had cancelled all; but perhaps I did not do it well enough, for he did not seem to enter into it. It was a terrible disadvantage in all this that I had been so slightly taught. I had been a fairly good girl, I believe, and my dear mother had her sweet, quiet, devotional habits; but religion had always sat, as it were, outside my daily life. I should have talked of "performing my religious duties" as if they were a sort of toll or custom to be paid to God, not as if one's whole life ought to be one religious duty. That sudden loss, which left me alone in the world, made me, as it were, realise who and what my Heavenly Father was to me; and I had in my loneliness thought more

of these things, and was learning more every day as I taught Dora; but it was dreadfully shallow, untried knowledge, and, unfortunately, I was the only person to whom Harold would talk Mr. Smith's having been a clergyman had given him a distaste and mistrust of all clergy; nor do I think he was quite kindly treated by those around us, for they held aloof, and treated him as a formidable stranger with an unknown ill repute, whose very efforts in the cause of good were untrustworthy.

I thought of that mighty man of Israel whom God had endowed with strength to save His people, and how all was made of little avail because his heart was not whole with God, and his doings were self-pleasing and fitful. Oh! that it might not be thus with my Harold? Might not that little child, who had for a moment opened the gates to him, yet draw him upwards where naught else would have availed?

As to talking to me, he did it very seldom, but he had a fashion of lingering to hear me teach Dora, and I found that, if he were absent,

he always made her tell him what she had learnt; nor did he shun the meeting me over Percy's picture in my sitting-room in the twilight Sunday hour. Now and then he asked me to find him some passage in the Bible which had struck him in the brief instruction to the children at the service, but what was going on in his mind was entirely out of my reach or scope; but that great strength and alertness, and keen, vivid interest in the world around, still made the present everything to him. I think his powerfulness, and habit of doing impossible things, made the thought of prayer and dependence—nay, even of redemption—more alien to him, as if weakness were involved in it; and though to a certain extent he had, with Prometesky beside him, made his choice between virtue and vice beside his uncle's death-bed; yet it was as yet but the Stoic virtue of the old Polish patriot that he had embraced.

And yet he was not the Stoic. He had far more of the little child, the Christian model in his simplicity, his truth, his tender heart, and that

grand modesty of character which, though natural, is the step to Christian humility. How one longed for the voice to say to him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

And so time went on, and we were still in solitude. People came and went, had their season in London and returned, but it made no difference to us. Dermot Tracy shot grouse, came home and shot partridges, and Eustace and Harold shared their sport with him, though Harold found it dull cramped work, and thought English gentlemen in sad lack of amusement to call that sport. Lady Diana and Viola went to the seaside, and came back, and what would have been so much to me once was nothing now. Pheasant shooting had begun and I had much ado to prevent Dora from joining the shooting parties, not only when her brother and cousin were alone, but when they were going to meet Mr. Tracy and some of the officers to whom he had introduced them.

On one of these October days, when I was trying to satisfy my discontented Dora by a game at ball upon the steps, to my extreme astonish-

ment I beheld a white pony, led by Harold, and seated on the same pony, no other than my dear little friend, unseen for four months, Viola Tracy!

I rushed, thinking some accident had happened, but Harold called out in a tone of exultation, "Here she is! Now you are to keep her an hour," and she held out her arms with "Lucy, Lucy, dear old Lucy!" and jumped down into mine.

"But Viola, your mother——"

"I could not help it," she said with a laughing light in her eyes. "No, indeed, I could not. I was riding along the lane by Lade Wood, on my white palfrey, when in the great dark glade there stood one, two, three great men with guns, and when one took hold of the damsel's bridle and told her to come with him, what could she do?"

I think I said something feeble about "Harold, how could you?" but he first shook his head, and led off the pony to the stable, observing, "I'll come for you in an hour," and Dora rushing after him.

And when I would have declared that it was very wrong, and that Lady Diana would be very angry, the child stopped my mouth with, "Never mind, I've got my darling Lucy for an hour, and I can't have it spoilt."

Have I never described my Viola? She was not tall, but she had a way of looking so, and she was not pretty, yet she always looked prettier than the prettiest person I ever saw. It was partly the way in which she held her head and long neck, just like a deer, especially when she was surprised, and looked out of those great dark eyes, whose colour was like that of the lakes of which each drop is clear and limpid, and yet, when you look down into the water, it is of a wonderful clear deep grey.

Those eyes were her most remarkable feature; her hair was light, her face went off suddenly into rather too short a chin, her cheeks wanted fulness, and were generally rather pale. So people said, but plump cheeks would have spoilt my Viola's air, of a wild, half-tamed fawn, and lessened the wonderful play of her lips, which

used often to express far more than ever came out of them in words. Lady Diana had done her utmost to suppress demonstrativeness, but unless she could have made those eyes less transparent, the corners of that mouth less flexible, and hindered the colour from mantling in those cheeks, she could not have kept Viola's feelings from being patent to all who knew her.

And now the child was really lovely, with the sweet carnation in her cheeks, and eyes dancing with the fear and pretence at alarm, and the delight of a stolen interview with me.

"Forth stepped the giant! Fee! fo! fum!" said she; "took me by the bridle, and said, 'Why haven't you been to see my Aunt Lucy?'

"'I must not,' she said.

"'And I say you must,' he answered. 'Do you know she is wearying to see you?'"

Then I fancy how Viola's tears would swim in her eyes as she said, "It's not me; it's mamma." And he answered, "Now, it is not you, but I, that is taking you to see her."

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot!" was whistled out of the wood; and the whistle Viola knew quite well enough to disarm me when I came to the argument what was to become of her if she let such things be done with her; and she had quite enough of Dermot's composition in her to delight in a "little bit of naughtiness that wasn't too bad," and when once she had resigned herself into the hands of her captor she enjoyed it, and twittered like a little bird; and I believe Harold really did it, just as he would have caught a rare bird or wild fawn, to please me.

"Then you were not frightened?" I said.

"Frightened? No. It was such fun! Besides, we heard how he mastered the lion to save that poor little boy, and how he has looked after him ever since, and is going to bind him apprentice. Oh, mind you show me his skin—the lion's, I mean. Don't be tiresome, Lucy. And how he goes on after the children's service with the dear little things. I should think him the last person to be afraid of."

"I wish your mother saw it so."

Viola put on a comically wise look, and shook her head, as she said, "You didn't go the right way to work. If you had come back in the carriage, and consulted her, and said it was a mission—yes, a mission—for you to stand, with a lily in your hand, and reform your two bush-ranger nephews, and that you wanted her consent and advice, then she would have let you go back and be good aunt, and what-not. Oh, I wish you had, Lucy! That was the way Dermot managed about getting the lodge at Biston. He says he could consult her into going out hunting."

"For shame, Viola! O fie! O Vi!" said I, according to an old formula of reproof.

"Really, I wanted to tell you. It might not be too late if you took to consulting her now; and I can't bear being shut up from you. Everything is grown so stupid. When one goes to a garden-party there are nothing but Horsmans and Stympsons, and they all get into sets of themselves and each other, and now and then coalesce, especially the Stympsons, to pity poor

Miss Alison, wonder at her not taking mamma's advice, and say how horrid it is of her to live with her cousins. I've corrected that so often that I take about with me the word 'nephews' written in large text, to confute them, and I've actually taught Cocky to say, 'Nephews aren't cousins.' Dermot is the only rational person in the neighbourhood. I'm always trying to get him to tell me about you, but he says he can't come up here much without giving a handle to the harpies."

I had scarcely said how good it was in Dermot, when he sauntered in. "There you are, Vi; I'm come to your rescue, you know," he said, in his lazy way, and disposed himself on the bear-skin as we sat on the sofa. I tried again to utter a protest. "Oh Dermot, it was all your doing."

"That's rather too bad. As if I could control your domestic lion-tamer."

"You abetted him. You could have prevented him."

"Such being your wish."

"I am thinking of your mother."

"Eh, Viola, is the meeting worth the reckoning?"

"You should not teach her your own bad ways," said I, resisting her embrace.

"Come, we had better be off, Dermot," she said, pouting; "we did not come here to be scolded."

"I thought you did not come of your own free will at all," I said, and then I found I had hurt her, and I had to explain that it was the disobedience that troubled me; whereupon they both argued seriously that people were not bound to submit to a cruel and unreasonable prejudice which had set the country in arms against us. "Monstrous," Dermot said, "that two fellows should suffer for their fathers' sins, and such fellows, and you too for not being unnatural to your own flesh and blood."

"But that does not make it right for Viola to disobey her mother."

"And how is it to be, Lucy?" asked Viola. "Are we always to go on in this dreadful way?"

By this time Eustace could no longer be withheld from paying his respects to the lady guest, and Harold and Dora came with him, bringing the kangaroo, for which Viola had entreated; and she also made him fetch the lion-skin, which had been dressed and lined and made into a beautiful carriage-rug; and to Dora she owed the exhibition of the great scar across Harold's left palm, which, though now no inconvenience, he would carry through life. It was but for a moment, for as soon as he perceived that Dora meant anything more than her usual play with his fingers, he coloured and thrust his hand into his pocket.

We all walked through the grounds with Viola, and when we parted she hung about my neck and assured me that now she had seen me she should not grieve half so much, and, let mamma say what she would, she could not be sorry; and I had no time to fight over the battle of the sorrow being for wrongdoing, not for reproof, for the pony would bear no more last words.

Eustace had behaved all along with much politeness; in fact, he was always seen to most

advantage with strangers, for his manners had some training, and a little constraint was good for him by repressing some of his sayings. His first remark, when the brother and sister were out of hearing, was, "A very sweet, lively young lady. I never saw her surpassed in Sydney!"

"I should think not," said Harold.

"Well, you know I have been presented and have been to a ball at Government House. There's an air, a *tournure* about her, such as uncle Smith says belongs to the real aristocracy; and you saw she was quite at her ease with me. We understand each other in the higher orders. Don't be afraid, Lucy, we shall yet bring back your friend to you."

"I'm glad she is gone," said Dora, true to her jealousy. "I like Dermot; he's got some sense in him, but she's not half so nice and pretty as Lucy."

At which we all laughed, for I had never had any attempt at beauty, except, I believe, good hair and teeth, and a habit of looking good-humoured.

"She's a tip-topper," pronounced Eustace, "and no wonder, considering who she is. Has she been presented, Lucy?"

Though she had not yet had that inestimable advantage, Eustace showed himself so much struck with her that, when next Harold found himself alone with me, he built a very remarkable castle in the air—namely, a wedding between Eustace and Viola Tracy. "If I saw him with such happiness as that," said Harold, "it would be all right. I should have no fears at all for him. Don't you think it might be, Lucy?"

"I don't think you took the way to recommend the family to Lady Diana," I said, laughing.

"I had not thought of it then," said Harold; "I'm always doing something wrong. I wonder if I had better go back and keep out of his way?"

He guessed what I should answer, I believe, for I was sure that Eustace would fail without Harold, and I told him that his cousin must not be left to himself till he had a good wife. To

which Harold replied, "Are all English ladies like that?"

He had an odd sort of answer the next day, when we were all riding together, and met another riding party—namely, the head of the Horsman family and his two sisters, who had been on the Continent when my nephews arrived. Mamma did not like them, and we had never been great friends; but they hailed me quite demonstratively with their eager, ringing voices: "Lucy! Lucy Alison! So glad to see you! Here we are again. Introduce us, pray."

So I did. Mr. Horsman, Miss Hippolyta, and Miss Philippa Horsman—Baby Jack, Hippo, and Pippa, as they were commonly termed—and we all rode together as long as we were on the Roman road, while they conveyed, rather loudly, information about the Dolomites.

They were five or six years older than I, and the recollection of childish tyranny and compulsion still made me a little afraid of them. They excelled in all kinds of sports in which we younger ones had not had nearly so much prac-

tice, and did not much concern themselves whether the sport were masculine or feminine, to the distress of the quiet elder half-sister, who stayed at home, like a hen with ducklings to manage.

They spoke of calling, and while I could not help being grateful, I knew how fallen my poor mother would think me to welcome the notice of Pippa and Hippo.

Most enthusiastic was the latter as she rode behind with me, looking at the proportions of Harry and his horse, some little way on before, with Dora on one side, and Pippa rattling on the other.

"Splendid! Splendiferous! More than I was prepared for, though I heard all about the lion —and that he has been a regular stunner in Australia—eh, Lucy, just like a hero of Whyte-Melville's, eh?"

"I don't think so."

"And, to complete it all, what has he been doing to little Viola Tracy? Oh, what fun! Carrying her off bodily to see you, wasn't it? Lady Diana is in such a rage as never was—says

Dermot is never to be trusted with his sister again, and won't let her go beyond the garden without her. Oh, the fun of it! I would have gone anywhere to see old Lady Di's face!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTURE IN THE SNOW.

I DO not recollect anything happening for a good while. Our chief event was the perfect success of Mr. Yolland's concentrated fuel, which did not blow up anything or anybody, and the production of some lovely Etruscan vases and tiles, for which I copied the designs out of a book I happily discovered in the library. They were sent up to the porcelain shops in London, and orders began to come in, to the great exultation of Harold and Co., an exultation which I could not help partaking, even while it seemed to me to be plunging him deeper and deeper in the dangerous speculation.

We put the vases into a shop in the town,

and wondered they did not sell; but happily people at a distance were kinder, and native genius was discovered in a youth, who soon made beautiful designs. But I do not think the revived activity of the unpopular pottery did us at that time any good with our neighbours.

Harold and Eustace sent in their subscriptions to the hunt and were not refused, but there were rumours that some of the Stympsons had threatened to withdraw.

I had half a mind to ride with them to the meet, but I could not tell who would cut me, and I knew the mortification would be so keen to them that I could not tell how they would behave, and I was afraid Eustace's pride in his scarlet coat might be as manifest to others as to us, and make me blush for him. So I kept Dora and myself at home.

I found that by the management of Dermot Tracy and his friends, the slight had been less apparent than had been intended, when all the other gentlemen had been asked in to Mr. Stympson's to breakfast, and they had been left out with

the farmers; Dermot had so resented this that he had declined going into the house, and ridden to the village inn with them.

To my surprise, Eustace chose to go on hunting, because it asserted his rights and showed he did not care; and, besides, the hard riding was almost a necessity to both the young men, and the Foling hounds, beyond Biston, were less exclusive, and they were welcomed there. I believe their horsemanship extorted admiration from the whole field, and that they were gathering acquaintance, though not among those who were most desirable. The hunting that was esteemed hard exercise here was nothing to them. They felt cramped and confined even when they had had the longest runs, and disdained the inclosures they were forced to respect. I really don't know what Harold would have done but for Kalydon Moor, where he had a range without inclosures of some twelve miles. I think he rushed up there almost every day, and thus kept himself in health, and able to endure the confinement of our civilised life.

A very hard winter set in unusually early, and with a great deal of snow in December. It was a great novelty to our Australians, and was not much relished by Eustace, who did not enjoy the snow-balling and snow fortification in which Harold and Dora revelled in front of the house all the forenoon. After luncheon, when the snowstorm had come on too thickly for Dora to go out again, Harold insisted on going to see how the world looked from the moor. I entreated him not to go far, telling him how easy it was to lose the way when all outlines were changed in a way that would baffle even a black fellow; but he listened with a smile, took a plaid and a cap and sallied forth. I played at shuttlecock for a good while with Dora, and then at billiards with Eustace; and when evening had closed darkly in, and the whole outside world was blotted out with the flakes and their mist, I began to grow a little anxious.

The hall was draughty, but there was a huge wood fire in it, and it seemed the best place to watch in, so there we sat together, and Eustace

abused the climate and I told stories—dismal ones, I fear—about sheep and shepherds, dogs and snowdrifts, to the tune of that peculiar howl that the wind always makes when the blast is snow laden; and dinner time came, and I could not make up my mind to go and dress so as to be out of reach of—I don't know what I expected to happen. Certainly what did happen was far from anything I had pictured to myself.

Battling with the elements and plunging in the snow, and seeing, whenever it slackened, so strange and new a world, was a sort of sport to Harold, and he strode on, making his goal the highest point of the moor, whence, if it cleared a little, he would be able to see to a vast distance. He was curious, too, to look down into the railway cutting. This was a sort of twig from a branch of the main line, chiefly due to Lord Erymanth, who, after fighting off the railway from all points adjacent to his estate, had found it so inconvenient to be without a station within reasonable distance, that a single line had at last been made from Mycening for the benefit of the places in this

direction, but not many trains ran on it, for it was not much frequented.

Harold came to the brow of the cutting, and there beheld the funnel of a locomotive engine, locomotive no more, but firmly embedded in the snowdrift into which it had run, with a poor little train of three or four carriages behind it, already half buried. Not a person was to be seen, as Harold scrambled and slid down the descent and lighted on the top of one of the carriages; for, as it proved, the engineer, stoker, and two or three passengers had left the train an hour before, and were struggling along the line to the nearest station. Harold got down on the farther side, which was free of snow, and looked into all the carriages. No one was there, till, in a first-class one, he beheld an old gentleman, well wrapped up indeed, but numb, stiff, and dazed with the sleep out of which he was roused.

"Tickets, eh?" he said, and he dreamily held one out to Harold and tried to get up, but he stumbled, and hardly seemed to understand when Harold told him it was not the station, but that

they had run into the snowdrift; he only muttered something about being met, staggered forward, and fell into Harold's arms. There was a carriage-bag on the seat, but Harold looked in vain there for a flask. The poor old man was hardly sensible.

Ours was the nearest house, and Harold saw that the only chance for the poor old gentleman's life was to carry him home at once. Even for him it was no small effort, for his burthen was a sturdy man with the solidity of years, and nearly helpless, save that the warmth of Harold's body did give him just life and instinct to hold on, and let himself be bound to him with the long plaid so as least to impede his movements; but only one possessed of Harold's almost giant strength could have thus clambered the cutting at the nearest point to Arghouse and plodded through the snow. The only wonder is that they were not both lost. Their track was marked as long as that snow lasted by mighty holes.

It was at about a quarter-past seven that

all the dogs barked, a fumbling was heard at the door, and a muffled voice, "Let me in."

Then in stumbled a heap of snow, panting, and amid Spitz's frantic barks, we saw it was Harold, bent nearly double by the figure tied to him. He sank on his knee, so as to place his burthen on the great couch, gasping, "Untie me," and as I undid the knot, he rose to his feet, panting heavily, and, in spite of the cold, bathed in perspiration.

"Get something hot for him directly," he said, falling back into an arm-chair, while we broke out in exclamations. "Who—where did you find him? Some poor old beggar. Not too near the fire—call Richardson—hot brandy-and-water—bed. He's some poor old beggar," and such outcries for a moment or two, till Harold, recovering himself in a second, explained, "Snowed up in the train. Here, Lucy, Eustace, rub his hands. Dora, ask Richardson for something hot. Are you better now, sir?" beginning to pull off the boots that he might rub his feet; but this measure roused the traveller, who resisted,

crying out, "Don't, don't, my good man, I'll reward you handsomely. I'm a justice of the peace."

Thick and stifled as it was, the voice was familiar. I looked again, and screamed out, "Lord Erymanth, is it you?"

That roused him, and as I took hold of both hands and bent over him, he looked up, dazzled and muttering, "Lucy, Lucy Alison! Arghouse! How came I here?" and then as the hot cordial came at last, in the hand of Richardson, who had once been in his service, he swallowed it, and then leant back and gazed at me as I went on rubbing his hands. "Thank you, my dear. Is it you? I thought I was snowed up, and I have never signed that codicil about little Viola, or I could die easily. It is not such a severe mode, after all."

"But you're not dying, you're only dreaming. You are at Arghouse. Harold here found you and brought you to us."

And then we agreed that he had better be put to bed at once in Eustace's room, as there

was already a fire there, and any other would take long in being warmed.

Harold and Eustace got him upstairs between them, and Richardson followed, while I looked out with dismay at the drifting snow, and wondered how to send either for a doctor or for Lady Diana in case of need. He had been a childless widower for many years, and had no one nearer belonging to him. Dora expressed her amazement that I did not go to help, but I knew this would have shocked him dreadfully, and I only sent Colman to see whether she could be of any use.

Harold came out first, and on his way to get rid of his snow-soaked garments, paused to tell me that the old gentleman had pretty well come round, and was being fed with hot soup and wine, while he seemed half asleep. "He is not frost-bitten," added Harold; "but if he is likely to want the doctor, I'd better go on to Mycening at once, before I change my things."

But I knew Lord Erymanth to be a hale, strong man of his years, little given to doctors, and as I heard he had said "No, no," when

Eustace proposed to send for one, I was glad to negative the proposal from a man already wet through and tired—"well, just a little."

Our patient dropped asleep almost as soon as he had had his meal, in the very middle of a ceremonious speech of thanks, which sent Eustace down to dinner more than ever sure that there was nothing like the aristocracy, who all understood one another; and we left Richardson to watch over him, and sleep in the dressing-room in case of such a catastrophe as a rheumatic waking in the night.

We were standing about the fire in the hall, our usual morning waiting-place before breakfast, and had just received Richardson's report that his lordship had had a good night, seemed none the worse, and would presently appear, but that he desired we would not wait breakfast, when there was a hasty ring at the door, and no sooner was it opened than Dermot Tracy, battered and worn, in a sou'-wester sprinkled with snow and with boots up to his thighs, burst into the hall.

"Alison, you there? All right, I want you," shaking hands in an agitated way all round, and speaking very fast with much emotion. "I want you to come and search for my poor uncle. He was certainly in the train from Mycening that ran into a drift. Men went to get help; couldn't get back for three hours. He wasn't there—never arrived at home. My mother is in a dreadful state. Hogg is setting all the men to dig at the Erymanth end. I've got a lot to begin in the Kalydon cutting; but you'll come, Alison, you'll be worth a dozen of them. He might be alive still, you see."

"Thank you, Dermot, I am happy to say that such is the case," said a voice from the oak staircase, and down it was slowly proceeding Lord Erymanth, as trim, and portly, and well brushed-up as if he had arrived behind his two long-tailed bays.

Dermot, with his eyes full of tears, which he was squeezing and winking away, and his rapid, broken voice, had seen and heard nothing in our faces or exclamations to prepare him. He started

violently and sprang forward, meeting Lord Erymanth at the foot of the stairs, and wringing both his hands—nay, I almost thought he would have kissed him, as he broke out into some incoherent cry of scarcely-believing joy, which perhaps surprised and touched the old man. "There, there, Dermot, my boy, your solicitude is—is honourable to you; but restrain—restrain it, my dear boy—we are not alone." And he advanced, a little rheumatically, to us, holding out his hand with morning greetings.

"I must send to my mother. Joe is here with the sleigh," said Dermot. "Uncle, how did you come here?" he added, as reflection only made his amazement profounder.

"It is true, as you said just now, that Mr. Harold Alison is equal to a dozen men. I owe my preservation, under Providence, to him," said Lord Erymanth, who, though not a small man, had to look far up as Harold stood towering above us all. "My most earnest acknowledgments are due to him," he added, solemnly holding out his hand.

"I might have expected that!" ejaculated Dermot, while Harold took the offered hand with a smile, and a mutter in his beard of "I am very glad."

"I'll just send a line to satisfy my mother," said Dermot, taking a pen from the inkstand on the hall-table. "Joe's here with the sleigh, and we must telegraph to George St. Glear."

Lord Erymanth repeated the name in some amazement, for he was not particularly fond of his heir.

"Hogg telegraphed to him this morning," and as the uncle observed, "Somewhat premature," he went on: "Poor Hogg was beside himself; he came to Arked at ten o'clock last night to look for you, and, luckily, I was there, so we've been hallooing half the night along the line, and then getting men together in readiness for the search as soon as it was light. I must be off to stop them at once. I came in to get the Alisons' help—never dreamt of such a thing as finding you here. And, after all, I don't understand—how did you come?"

"I cannot give you a detailed account," said his lordship. "Mr. Harold Alison roused me from a drowsiness which might soon, very probably, have been fatal, and brought me here. I have no very distinct recollection of the mode, and I fear I must have been a somewhat helpless and encumbering burthen."

Dora put in her oar. "Harry can carry anything," she said; "he brought you in so nicely on his back—just as I used to ride."

"On his back!"

"Yes," said Dora, who was fond of Mr. Tracy, and glad to impart her information, "on his back, with his boots sticking out on each side, so funnily!"

Lord Erymanth endeavoured to swallow the information suavely by the help of a classical precedent, and said, with a gracious smile, "Then I perceive we must have played the part of Æneas and Anchises——" But before he had got so far, the idea had been quite too much for Dermot, who cried out, "Pick-a-back! With his boots sticking out on both sides! Thank you, Dora.

Oh! my uncle, pick-a-back!" and went off in an increasing, uncontrollable roar of laughter, while Harold, with a great tug to his moustache, observed apologetically to Lord Erymanth, "It was the only way I could do it," which speech had the effect of so prolonging poor Dermot's mirth, that all the good effect of the feeling he had previously displayed for his uncle was lost, and Lord Erymanth observed, in his most dry and solemn manner, "There are some people who can see nothing but food for senseless ridicule in the dangers of their friends."

"My dear Lord Erymanth," I said, almost wild, "do just consider Dermot has been up all night, and has had nothing to eat, and is immensely relieved to find you all safe. He can't be expected to quite know what he is about when he is so shaken. Come to breakfast, and we shall all be better."

"That might be a very sufficient excuse for you or for Viola, my dear Lucy," returned Lord Erymanth, taking, however, the arm I offered. "Young *ladies* may be very amiably hysterical,

but a young man, in my day, who had not trifled away his manliness, would be ashamed of such an excuse."

There was a certain truth in what he said. Dermot was not then so strong, nor had he the self-command he would have had, if his life had been more regular; but he must always have had a much more sensitive and emotional nature than his uncle could ever understand. The reproach, however, sobered him in a moment, and he followed us gravely into the dining-room, without uttering a word for the next quarter of an hour; neither did Harold, who was genuinely vexed at having made the old man feel himself ridiculous, and was sorry for the displeasure with his friend. Nobody did say much except Eustace, who was delighted at having to play host to such distinguished guests, and Lord Erymanth himself, who was so gracious and sententious as quite to restore Dermot's usual self by the time breakfast was over, and he saw his servant bringing back his sleigh, in which he offered to convey his uncle either home or to Arked. But it was still fit-

fully snowing, and Lord Erymanth was evidently not without touches of rheumatism, which made him lend a willing ear to our entreaties to him not to expose himself. Harold then undertook to go in search of his portmanteau either to the scene of the catastrophe or the Hall.

"My dear sir, I could not think of exposing you to a repetition of such inclement weather as you have already encountered. I am well supplied here, my young friend—I think I may use the term, considering that two generations ago, at least, a mutual friendship existed between the houses, which, however obscured for a time—hum—hum—hum—may be said still to exist towards my dear friend's very amiable young daughter; and although I may have regretted as hasty and premature a decision that, as her oldest and most experienced—I may say paternal—friend, I ventured to question—you will excuse my plain speaking; I am always accustomed to utter my sentiments freely—yet on better acquaintance—brought about as it was in a manner which, however peculiar, and, I may say, unpleasant—

cannot do otherwise than command my perpetual gratitude—I am induced to revoke a verdict, uttered, perhaps, rather with a view to the antecedents than to the individuals, and to express a hope that the ancient family ties may again assert themselves, and that I may again address as such Mr. Alison of Arghouse."

That speech absolutely cleared the field of Harold and Dermot both. One strode, the other backed, to the door, Dermot hastily said, "Good-bye then, uncle, I shall look you up to-morrow, but I must go and stop George St. Glear," and Harold made no further ceremony, but departed under his cover.

Probably, Richardson had spoken a word or two in our favour to his former master, for, when Lord Erymanth was relieved from his nephew's trying presence, he was most gracious, and his harangues, much as they had once fretted me, had now a familiar sound, as proving that we were no longer "at the back of the north wind," while Eustace listened with rapt attention, both to the long words and to anything coming from

one whose name was enrolled in his favourite volume; who likewise discovered in him likenesses to generations past of Alisons, and seemed ready to admit him to all the privileges for which he had been six months pining.

At the first opportunity, Lord Erymanth began to me, "My dear Lucy, it is a confession that to some natures may seem humiliating, but I have so sedulously cultivated candour for my whole term of existence, that I hope I may flatter myself that I am not a novice in the great art of retracting a conclusion arrived at under promises which, though probable, have proved to be illusory. I therefore freely confess that I have allowed probability to weigh too much with me in my estimation of these young men." I almost jumped for joy as I cried out that I knew he would think so when he came to know them.

"Yes, I am grateful to the accident that has given me the opportunity of judging for myself," quoth Lord Erymanth, and with a magnanimity which I was then too inexperienced to perceive, he added, "I can better estimate the motives

which made you decide on fixing your residence with your nephews, and I have no reluctance in declaring them natural and praiseworthy." I showed my satisfaction in my old friend's forgiveness, but he still went on: "Still, my dear, you must allow me to represent that your residence here, though it is self-innocent, exposes you to unpleasant complications. I cannot think it well that a young lady of your age should live entirely with two youths without female society, and be constantly associating with such friends as they may collect round them."

I remember now how the unshed tears burnt in my eyes as I said the female society had left me to myself, and begged to know with whom I had associated. In return I heard something that filled me with indignation about his nephew, Dermot Tracy, not being exactly the companion for an unchaperoned young lady, far less his sporting friends, or that young man who had been Dr. Kingston's partner. He was very sorry for me, as he saw my cheeks flaming, but he felt it right that I should be aware. I told him how I

had guarded myself — never once come across the sportsmen, and only seen Mr. Yolland professionally when he showed me how to dress Harold's hand, besides the time when he went over the pottery with us. Nay, Dermot himself had only twice come into my company—once about his sister, and once to inquire after Harold after the adventure with the lion.

There I found I had alluded to what made Lord Erymanth doubly convinced that I must be blinded; my sight must be amiably obscured, as to the unfitness—he might say, the impropriety of such companions for me. He regretted all the more where his nephew was concerned, but it was due to me to warn, to admonish, me of the true facts of the case.

I did not see how I could want any admonition of the true facts I had seen with my own eyes.

He was intensely astonished, and did not know how to believe that I had actually seen the lion overpowered; whereupon I begged to know what he had heard. He was very unwilling

to tell me, but it came out at last that Dermot and Harold—being, he feared, in an improperly excited condition—had insisted on going to the den with the keeper, and had irritated the animal by wanton mischief, and he was convinced that this could not have taken place in my presence.

I was indignant beyond measure. Had not Dermot told him the true story? He shook his head, and was much concerned at having to say so, but he had so entirely ceased to put any confidence in Dermot's statements that he preferred not listening to them. And I knew it was vain to try to show him the difference between deliberate falsehood, which was abhorrent to Dermot, and the exaggerations and mystifications to which his uncle's solemnity always prompted him. I appealed to the county paper; but he had been abroad at the time, and had, moreover, been told that the facts had been hushed up.

Happily, he had some trust in my veracity, and let me prove my perfect alibi for Harold as well as for Dermot. When I represented how

those two were the only men among some hundreds who had shown either courage or coolness, he granted it with the words, "True, true. Of course, of course. That's the way good blood shows itself. Hereditary qualities are sure to manifest themselves."

Then he let me exonerate Harold from the charge of intemperance, pointing out that not even after the injury and operation, nor after yesterday's cold and fatigue, had he touched any liquor; but I don't think the notion of teetotalism was gratifying, even when I called it a private, individual vow. Nor could I make out whether his Australian life was known, and I was afraid to speak of it, lest I should be betraying what need never be mentioned. Of Viola's adventure, to my surprise, her uncle did not make much, but he had heard of that from the fountain-head, unpolluted by Stympson gossip; and, moreover, Lady Diana had been so disproportionately angry as to produce a reaction in him. Viola was his darling, and he had taken her part when he had found that she knew her brother was at hand.

He allowed, too, that she might fairly be inspired with confidence by the voice and countenance of her captor, whom he seemed to view as a good-natured giant. But even this was an advance on "the prize-fighter," as Lady Diana and the Stympsons called him.

It was an amusing thing to hear the old earl moralising on the fortunate conjunction of circumstances, which had brought the property, contrary to all expectation, to the most suitable individual. Much did I long for Harold to return and show what he was, but only his lordship's servant, letters, and portmanteau came on an improvised sleigh. He had an immense political, county, and benevolent correspondence, and was busied with it all the rest of the day. Eustace hovered about reverentially and obligingly, and secured the good opinion which had been already partly gained by the statement of the police at the Quarter Sessions, whence Lord Erymanth had been returning, that they never had had so few cases from the Hydriot potteries as during this last quarter. Who could be complimented upon

this happy state of things save the chairman? And who could appropriate the compliment more readily or with greater delight? Even I felt that it would be cruel high treason to demonstrate which was the mere chess king.

Poor Eustace! Harold had infected me enough with care for him to like to see him in such glory, though somewhat restless as to the appearances of this first state dinner of ours, and at Harold's absence; but, happily, the well-known step was in the hall before our guest came downstairs, and Eustace dashed out to superintend the toilette that was to be as worthy of meeting with an earl as nature and garments would permit. "Fit to be seen?" I heard Harold growl. "Of course I do when I dine with Lucy, and this is only an old man."

Eustace and Richardson had disinterred and brushed up Harold's only black suit (ordered as mourning for his wife, and never worn but at his uncle's funeral); but three years' expansion of chest and shoulder had made it pinion him so as to lessen the air of perfect ease which, without

being what is called grace, was goodly to look upon. Eustace's studs were in his shirt, and the unnatural shine on his tawny hair too plainly revealed the perfumeries that crowded the young squire's dressing-table. With the purest intentions of kindness Eustace had done his best to disguise a demigod as a lout.

We had a *dîner à la Russe*, to satisfy Eustace's aspirations as to the suitable. I had been seeking resources for it all the afternoon and building up erections with Richardson and Colman; and when poor Harold, who had been out in the snow with nothing to eat since breakfast, beheld it, he exclaimed, "Lucy, why did you not tell me? I could have gone over to Mycening and brought you home a leg of mutton."

"Don't expose what a cub you are!" muttered the despairing Eustace. "It is a deena à la Roos."

"I thought the Russians ate blubber," observed Harold, somewhat unfeelingly, though I don't think he saw the joke; but I managed to reassure him, *sotto voce*, as to there being some-

thing solid in the background. He was really ravenous, and it was a little comedy to see the despairing contempt with which he regarded the dainty little mouthfuls that the cook viewed with triumph, and Eustace in equal misery at his savage appetite; while Lord Erymanth, far too real a gentleman to be shocked at a man's eating when he was hungry, was quite insensible of the by-play until Harold, reduced to extremity at sight of one delicate shaving of turkey's breast, burst out, "I say, Richardson, I must have some food. Cut me its leg, please, at once!"

"Harry," faintly groaned Eustace, while Lord Erymanth observed, "Ah! there is no such receipt for an appetite as shooting in the snow. I remember when a turkey's leg would have been nothing to me, after being out duck-shooting in Kalydon Bog. Have you been there to-day? There would be good sport."

"No," said Harold, contented at last with the great leg, which seemed in the same proportion to him as a chicken's to other men. "I have been getting sheep out of the snow."

I elicited from him that he had, in making his way to Erymanth, heard the barking of a dog, and found that a shepherd and his flock had taken refuge in a hollow of the moor, which had partly protected them from the snow, but whence they could not escape. The shepherd, a drover who did not know the locality, had tried with morning light to find his way to help, but, spent and exhausted, would soon have perished, had not Harold been attracted by the dog. After dragging him to the nearest farm, Harold left the man to be restored by food and fire, while performing his own commission at the castle, and then returned to spend the remainder of the daylight hours in helping to extricate the sheep, and convey them to the farmyard, so that only five had been lost.

"An excellent, not to say a noble, manner of spending a winter's day," quoth the earl.

"I am a sheep farmer myself," was the reply.

Lord Erymanth really wanted to draw him

out, and began to ask about Australian stock-farming, but Harold's slowness of speech left Eustace to reply to everything, and when once the rage of hunger was appeased, the harangues in a warm room after twenty miles' walk in the snow, and the carrying some hundreds of sheep one by one in his arms, produced certain nods and snores which were no favourable contrast with Eustace's rapt attention.

For, honestly, Eustace thought these speeches the finest things he had ever heard, and though he seldom presumed to understand them, he listened earnestly, and even imitated them in a sort of disjointed way. Now Lord Erymanth, if one could manage to follow him, was always coherent. His sentences would parse, and went on uniform principles—namely the repeating every phrase in finer words, with all possible qualifications; whereas Eustace never accomplished more than catching up some sonorous period; but as his manners were at their best when he was overawed, and nine months in England had so far improved his taste that he did not once

refer to his presentation at Government House, he made such an excellent impression that Lord Erymanth announced that he was going to give a ball to introduce his niece, Miss Tracy, on her seventeenth birthday, in January, and invited us all thereto.

Eustace's ecstacy was unbounded. He tried to wake Harold to share it, but only produced some murmurs about half-inch bullets: only when the "Good-night" came did Harold rouse up, and then, of course, he was wide awake; and while Eustace was escorting the distinguished guest to his apartment, we stood over the hall fire, enjoying his delight, and the prospect of his being righted with the county.

"And you will have your friends again, Lucy," added Harold.

"Yes, I don't suppose Lady Diana will hold out against him. He will prepare the way."

"And," said Eustace, coming downstairs, "it is absolutely necessary that you go and be measured for a dress suit, Harry."

"I will certainly never get into this again,"

he said, with a thwarted sigh; "it's all I can do to help splitting it down the back. You must get it off as you got it on."

"Not here!" entreated Eustace, alarmed at his gesture. "Remember the servant. Oh Harðld, if you could but be more the gentleman! Why cannot you take example by me, instead of overthrowing all the advantageous impressions that such—such a service has created. I really think there's nothing he would not do for me. Don't you think so, Lucy?"

"Could he do anything for Prometesky?" asked Harold.

"He *could*, more than anyone," I said; "but I don't know if he would."

"I'll see about that."

"Now, Harold," cried Eustace in dismay, "don't spoil everything by offending him. Just suppose he should not send us the invitation!"

"No great harm done."

Eustace was incoherent in his wrath and horror, and Harold, too much used to his childish

selfishness to feel the annoyance, answered, "I am not you."

"But if you offend him?"

"Never fear, Eu, I'll take care you don't fare the worse."

And as he lighted his candle he added to poor Eustace's discomfiture by the shocking utterance under his beard:

"You are welcome to him for me, if you can stand such an old bore."

CHAPTER VI.

OGDEN'S BUILDINGS.

WHEN I came downstairs the next morning, I found Lord Erymanth at the hall window, watching the advance of a great waggon of coal which had stuck fast in the snow half way up the hill on which the house stood. Harold, a much more comfortable figure in his natural costume than he had been when made up by Eustace, was truly putting his shoulder to the wheel, with a great lever, so that every effort aided the struggling horses, and brought the whole nearer to its destination.

"A grand exhibition of strength," said his lordship, as the waggon was at last over its difficulties, and Harold disappeared with it into the back-yard; "a magnificent physical development.

I never before saw extraordinary height with proportionate size and strength."

I asked if he had ever seen anyone as tall.

"I have seen one or two men who looked equally tall, but they stooped and were not well-proportioned, whereas your nephew has a wonderfully fine natural carriage. What is his measure?" he added, turning to Eustace.

"Well, really, my lord, I cannot tell; mine is six feet two and five-sixteenths, and I much prefer it to anything so out of the way as his, poor fellow."

The danger that he would go on to repeat his tailor's verdict "that it was distinguished without being excessive," was averted by Harold's entrance, and Dora interrupted the greetings by the query to her cousin, how high he really stood; but he could not tell, and when she unfraternally pressed to know whether it was not nice to be so much taller than Eustace, he replied, "Not on board ship," and then he gave the intelligence that it seemed about to thaw.

Lord Erymanth said that if so, he should try

to make his way to Mycening, and he then paid his renewed compliments on the freedom of the calendar at the Quarter Sessions from the usual proportion of evils at Mycening. He understood that Mr. Alison was making most praiseworthy efforts to impede the fatal habits of intoxication that were only too prevalent.

"I shall close five beer-houses at Christmas," said Eustace. "I look on it as my duty, as landlord and man of property."

"Quite right. I am glad you see the matter in its right light. Beer-shops were a well-meaning experiment started some twenty years ago. I well remember the debate, &c."

Harold tried with all his might to listen, though I saw his chest heave with many a suppressed yawn, and his hand under his beard, tweaking it hard; but substance could be sifted out of what Lord Erymanth said, for he had real experience, and his own parish was in admirable order.

Where there was no power of expulsion, as he said, there would always be some degraded

beings whose sole amusement was intoxication; but good dwelling-houses capable of being made cheerful, gardens, innocent recreations, and instruction had, he could testify from experience, no small effect in preventing such habits from being formed in the younger population, backed, as he was sure (good old man) that he need not tell his young friends, by an active and efficient clergyman, who would place the motives for good conduct on the truest and highest footing, without which all reformation would only be surface work. I was glad Harold should hear this from the lips of a layman, but I am afraid he shirked it as a bit of prosing, and went back to the cottages.

"They are in a shameful state," he said.

"They are to be improved," exclaimed Eustace, eagerly. "As I told Bullock, I am quite determined that mine shall be a model parish. I am ready to make any sacrifices to do my duty as a landlord, though Bullock says that no outlay on cottages ever pays, and that the test of their being habitable is their being let, and that the

people are so ungrateful that they do not deserve to have anything done for them."

"You are not led away by such selfish arguments?" said Lord Erymanth.

"No, assuredly not," said Eustace, decidedly; "though I *do* wish Harold would not disagree so much with Bullock. He is a very civil man, and much in earnest in promoting my interests."

"That's not all," put in Harold.

"And I can't bear Bullock," I said. "'Our interest' has been always his cry, whenever the least thing has been proposed for the cottage people; and I know how much worse he let things get than we ever supposed."

On which Lord Erymanth spoke out his distinct advice to get rid of Bullock, telling us how he had been a servant's orphan whom my father had intended to apprentice, but, being placed with our old bailiff for a time, had made himself necessary, and ingratiated himself with my father so as to succeed to the situation; and it had been the universal belief, ever since my mother's widowhood, that he had taken advantage of her seclusion

and want of knowledge of business to deal harshly by the tenants, especially the poor, and to feather his own nest.

It was only what Harold had already found out for himself, but it disposed of his scruples about old adherents, and it was well for Eustace to hear it from such oracular lips as might neutralise the effect of Bullock's flattery, for it had become quite plain to my opened eyes that he was trying to gain the squire's ear, and was very jealous of Harold.

I knew, too, that to listen to his advice was the way to Lord Erymanth's heart, and rejoiced to hear Harold begging for the names of recent books on drainage, and consulting our friend upon the means of dealing with a certain small farm in a tiny enclosed valley, on an outlying part of the property, where the yard and outhouses were in a permanent state of horrors; but interference was alike resented by Bullock and the farmer, though the wife and family were piteous spectacles of ague and rheumatism, and low fever smouldered every autumn in the hamlet.

Very sound advice was given and accepted with pertinent questions, such as I thought must convince anyone of Harold's superiority, when he must needs produce a long blue envelope, and beg Lord Erymanth to look at it and tell him how to get it presented to the Secretary of State.

It was graciously received, but no sooner did the name of Stanislas Prometesky strike the earl's eyes than he exclaimed, "That rascally old demagogue! The author of all the mischief. It was the greatest error and weakness not to have had him executed."

"You have not seen my father's statement?"

"Statement, sir! I read statements till I was sick of them, absolutely disgusted with their reiteration, and what could they say but that he was a Pole? A Pole!" (the word uttered with infinite loathing). "As if the very name were not a sufficient conviction of whatever is seditious and treasonable, only that people are sentimental about it, forsooth!"

Certainly it was droll to suspect sentiment in

the great broad giant, who indignantly made reply, "The Poles have been infamously treated."

"No more than they deserved," said Lord Erymanth, startled for once into brevity. "A nation who could never govern themselves decently, and since they have been broken up, as they richly deserved, though I do not justify the manner—ever since, I say, have been acting the incendiary in every country where they have set foot. I would as soon hear of an infernal machine in the country as a Pole!"

"Poles deserve justice as well as other men," said Harold, perhaps the more doggedly because Eustace laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that every man has not received justice at the tribunal of this country?" exclaimed Lord Erymanth.

Perhaps he recollected that he was speaking to the son of a convict, for there was a moment's pause, into which I launched myself. "Dear Lord Erymanth," I said, "we all know that my poor brothers did offend against the laws and were

sentenced according to them. They said so themselves, and that they were mistaken, did they not, Harold?"

Harold bent his head.

"And owing to whom?" demanded Lord Erymanth. "I never thought of blaming those two poor lads as I did that fellow who led them astray. I did all I could to save their lives; if they were alive this moment I would wish nothing better than to bring them home, but as to asking me to forward a petition in favour of the hoary old rebel that perverted them, I should think it a crime."

"But," I said, "if you would only read this, you would see that what they wanted to explain was that the man who turned king's evidence did not show how Count Prometesky tried to withhold them."

"Count, indeed! Just like all women. All those Poles are Counts! All Thaddeuses of Warsaw!"

"That's hard," I said. "I only called him Count because it would have shocked you if I

had given him no prefix. Will you not see what poor Ambrose wanted to say for him?"

"Ah!" said Lord Erymanth, after a pause, in which he had really glanced over the paper. "Poor boys! It goes to my heart to think what fine fellows were lost there, but compassion for them cannot soften me towards the man who practised on their generous, unsuspecting youth. I am quite aware that Prometesky saved life at the fire, and his punishment was commuted on that account, contrary to my judgment, for it is a well-known axiom, that the author of a riot is responsible for all the outrages committed in it, and it is undeniable that the whole insurrection was his work. I am quite aware that the man had amiable, even fascinating qualities, and great enthusiasm, but here lay the great danger and seduction to young minds; and though I can perfectly understand the warm sympathy and generous sentiment that actuates my young friends, and though I much regret the being obliged to deny the first request of one to whom, I may say, I owe my life, I must distinctly refuse

to take any part in relieving *Count* Stanislas Prometesky from the penalty he has incurred."

Harold's countenance had become very gloomy during this peroration. He made no attempt at reply, but gathered up his papers, and, gnawing his fringe of moustache, walked out of the room, while Eustace provoked me by volunteering explanations that Prometesky was no friend of his, only of Harold's. His lordship declared himself satisfied, provided no dangerous opinions had been imbibed, and truly Eustace might honestly acquit himself of having any opinions at all.

That afternoon he drove Lord Erymanth to Mycening, whence the railway was now open. Harold could nowhere be found, and kind messages were left for him, for which he was scarcely grateful when he came in late in the evening, calling Lord Erymanth intolerably vindictive, to bear malice for five-and-twenty years.

I could not get him to see that it was entirely judicial indignation, and desire for the

good of the country, not in the least personal feeling; but Harold had not yet the perception of the legislative sentiment that actuates men of station in England. His strong inclination was not to go near the old man or his house again, but this was no small distress to Eustace, who, in spite of all his vaunting, dreaded new scenes without a protector, and I set myself to persuade him that it was due to his cousin not to hide himself, and avoid society so as to give a colour to evil report.

"It might be best to separate myself from him altogether and go back." On this, Eustace cried out with horror and dismay, and Harold answered, "Never fear, old chap; I'm not going yet. Not till I have seen you in good hands."

"And you'll accept the invitation," said Eustace, taking up one of the coroneted notes that invited us each for two nights to the castle.

"Very well."

"And you'll come up to town, and have a proper suit."

"As you please."

Eustace went off to the library to find some crested paper and envelopes worthy to bear the acceptance, and Harold stood musing. "A good agent and a good wife would set him on his feet to go alone," he said.

"Meantime he cannot do without you."

"Not in some ways."

"And even this acquaintance is your achievement, not his."

"Such as it is."

I pointed out that though Lord Erymanth refused to assist Prometesky, his introduction might lead to those who might do so, while isolation was a sort of helplessness. To this he agreed, saying, "I must free him before I go back."

"And do you really want to go back?" said I, fearing he was growing restless.

His face worked, and he said, "When I feel like a stone round Eustace's neck."

"Why should you feel so? You are a lever to lift him."

"Am I? The longer I live with you, the

more true it seems to me that I had no business to come into a world with such people in it as you and Miss Tracy."

Eustace came back, fidgeting to get a pen mended, an operation beyond him, but patiently performed by the stronger fingers. We said no more, but I had had a glimpse which made me hope that the pilgrim was beginning to feel the burthen on his back.

Not that he had much time for thought. He was out all day, looking after the potteries, where orders were coming in fast, and workmen increasing, and likewise toiling in the fields at Ogden's farm, making measurements and experiments on the substrata and the waterfall, on which to base his plans for drainage according to the books Lord Erymanth had lent him.

After the second day he came home half-laughing. Farmer Ogden had warned him off and refused to listen to any explanation, though he must have known whom he was expelling—yes, like a very village Hampden, he had thrust the unwelcome surveyor out at his gate with such

a trembling, testy, rheumatic arm, that Harold had felt obliged to obey it.

Eustace, angered at the treatment of *his* cousin, volunteered to come and "tell the ass, Ogden, to mind what he was about," and Harold added, "If you would come, Lucy, you might help to make his wife understand."

I came, as I was desired, where I had never been before, for we had always rested in the belief that the Alfy Valley was a nasty, damp, unhealthy place, with "something always about," and had contented ourselves with sending broth to the cottages whenever we heard of any unusual amount of disease. If we had ever been there!

We rode the two miles, as I do not think Dora and I would ever have floundered through the mud and torrents that ran down the lanes. It was just as if the farm had been built in the lower circle, and the cottages in Malebolge itself, where the poor little Alfy, so pure when it started from Kalydon Moor, brought down to them all the leakage of that farmyard. Oh! that yard, I never

beheld, imagined, or made my way through the like, though there was a little causeway near the boundary wall, where it was possible to creep along on the stones, rousing up a sleeping pig or a dreamy donkey here and there, and barked at in volleys by dogs stationed on all the higher islets in the unsavoury lake. If Dora had not been a colonial child, and if I could have feared for myself with Harold by my side, I don't think we should ever have arrived, but Farmer Ogden and his son came out, and a man and boy or two; and when Eustace was recognised, they made what way they could for us, and we were landed at last in a scrupulously clean kitchen with peat fire and a limeash floor, where, alas! we were not suffered to remain, but were taken into a horrid little parlour, with a newly-lighted, smoking fire, a big Bible, and a ploughing-cup. Mrs. Ogden was a dissenter, so we had really no acquaintance, and, poor thing, had long been unable to go anywhere. She was a pale trembling creature, most neat and clean, but with the dreadful sallow complexion given by

perpetual ague. She was very civil, and gave us cake and wine, to the former of which Dora did ample justice; but oh! the impracticability of those people!

The men had it all out of doors, but when I tried my eloquence on Mrs. Ogden I found her firmly persuaded not only that her own ill health and the sickness in the hamlet were "the will of the Lord," but in her religious fatalism, that it was absolutely profane to think that cleansing and drainage would amend them; and she adduced texts which poor uninstructed I was unable to answer, even while I knew they were a perversion; and, provoked as I was, I felt that her meek patience and resignation might be higher virtues than any to which I had yet attained.

Her husband, who, I should explain, was but one remove above a smock-frock farmer, took a different line. He had unsavoury proverbs in which he put deep faith. "Muck was the mother of money," and also "Muck was the farmer's nosegay." He viewed it as an absolute effemi-

nacy to object to its odorous savours; and as to the poor people, "they were an ungrateful lot, and had a great deal too much done for them," the small farmer's usual creed. Mr. Alison could do as he liked, of course, but his lease had five years yet to run, and he would not consent to pay no more rent, not for what he didn't ask for, nor didn't want, and Mr. Bullock didn't approve of—that he would not, not if Mr. Alison took the law of him.

His landlord do it at his own expense? That made him look knowing. He was evidently certain that it was a trick for raising the rent at the end of the lease, if not before, upon him, whose fathers had been tenants of Alfy Vale even before the Alisons came to Arghouse; and, with the rude obstinacy of his race, he was as uncivil to Harold as he durst in Eustace's presence. "He had no mind to have his fields cut up just to sell the young gentleman's drain-pipes, as wouldn't go off at them potteries."

"Well, but all this stuff would be doing much more good upon your fields than here," Eustace

said. "I—I really must insist on this farmyard being cleansed."

"You'll not find that in the covenant, sir," said the farmer with a grin.

"But, father," began the son, a more intelligent-looking man, though with the prevailing sickly tint.

"Hold your tongue, Phil," said Ogden. "It's easy to talk of cleaning out the yard; I'd like to see the gentleman set about it, or you either, for that matter."

"Would you?" said Harold. "Then you shall."

Farmer Ogden gaped. "I won't have no strange labourers about the place."

"No more you shall," said Harold. "If your son and I clean out this place with our own hands in the course of a couple of days, putting the manure in any field you may appoint, will you let the drainage plans be carried out without opposition?"

"It ain't a bet?" said the farmer; "for my missus's conscience is against bets."

"No, certainly not."

"Nor a trick?" he said, looking from one to another.

"No. It is to be honest work. I am a farmer, and know what work is, and have done it too."

Farmer Ogden, to a certain extent, gave in, and we departed. His son held the gate open for us, with a keen look at Harold, full of wonder and inquiry.

"You'll stand by me?" said Harold, lingering with him.

"Yes, sir," said Phil Ogden; "but I doubt if we can do it. Father says it is a week's work for five men, if you could get them to do it."

"Never fear," said Harold. "We'll save your mother's life yet against her will, and make you all as healthy as if you'd been born in New South Wales."

This was Friday, and Phil had an engagement on the Monday, so that Tuesday was fixed, much to Eustace's displeasure, for he did not like Harold's condescending to work which labourers would hardly undertake; and besides, he would

make his hands, if not himself, absolutely unfit for the entertainment on Thursday. On which Harold asked if there were no such thing as water. Eustace implored him to give it up and send half-a-dozen unemployed men, but to this he answered, "I should be ashamed."

And when we went home he rode on into Mycening, to see about his equipment, he said, setting Eustace despairing, lest he, after all, meant to avoid the London tailor, and to patronise Mycening; but the equipment turned out to be a great smock-frock. And something very different came home with him — namely, a little dainty flower-pot and pan, with an Etruscan pattern, the very best things that had been turned out of the pottery, adorned with a design in black and white, representing a charming little Greek nymph watering her flowers.

"Don't you think, Lucy, Miss Tracy being a shareholder, and it being her birthday, the chairman might present this?" he inquired.

I agreed heartily, but Eustace, with a twist of his cat's-whisker moustache, opined that they were

scarcely elegant enough for Miss Tracy; and on the Monday, when he did drag Harold up to the tailor's, he brought down a fragile little bouquet of porcelain violets, very Parisian, and in the latest fashion, which he flattered himself was the newest thing extant, and a much more appropriate offering. The violets could be made by a pinch below to squirt out perfume!

"Never mind, Harold," I said, "you can give your flower-pot all the same."

"You may," said Harold.

"Why should not you?"

He shook his head. "I've no business," he said; "Eustace is chairman."

I said no more, and I hardly saw Harold the two following days, for he was gone in the twilight of the January morning and worked as long as light would allow, and fortunately the moon was in a favourable quarter; and Phil, to whom the lighter part of the task was allotted, confided to his companion that he had been wishing to get father to see things in this light for a long time, but he was *that* slow to move; and since Harold

had been looking about, Mr. Bullock had advised him not to give in, for it would be sure to end in the raising of his rent, and young gentlemen had new-fangled notions that only led to expense and nonsense, and it was safest in the long run to trust to the agent.

However, the sight of genuine, unflinching toil, with nothing of the amateur about it, had an eloquence of its own. Farmer Ogden looked on grimly and ironically for the first two hours, having only been surprised into consent in the belief that any man, let alone a gentleman, must find out the impracticability of the undertaking, and be absolutely sickened. Then he brought out some bread and cheese and cider, and was inclined to be huffy when Harold declined the latter, and looked satirical when he repaired to wash his hands at the pump before touching the former. When he saw two more hours go by in work of which he could judge, his furrowed old brow grew less puckered, and he came out again to request Mr. Harold to partake of the mid-day meal. I fancy Harold's going up to

Phil's room, to make himself respectable for Mrs. Ogden's society, was as strange to the farmer as were to the Australian the good wife's excuses for making him sit down with the family in the kitchen; but I believe that during the meal he showed himself practical farmer enough to win their respect; and when he worked harder than ever all the afternoon, even till the last moment it was possible to see, and came back with the light the next morning, he had won his cause; above all, when the hunt swept by without disturbing the labour.

The farmer not only turned in his scanty supply of men to help to finish off the labour, and seconded contrivances which the day before he would have scouted, but he gave his own bowed back to the work. A pavement of the court which had not seen the day for forty years was brought to light; and by a series of drain tiles, for which a messenger was dispatched to the pottery, streams were conducted from the river to wash these up; and at last, when Harold appeared, after Eustace had insisted on waiting no longer for dinner,

he replied to our eager questions, "Yes, it is done."

"And Ogden?"

"He thanked me, shook hands with me, and said I was a man."

Which we knew meant infinitely more than a gentleman.

Harold wanted to spend Thursday in banking up the pond in the centre of the yard, but the idea seemed to drive Eustace to distraction. Such work before going to that sublime region at Erymanth! He laid hold of Harold's hands—shapely hands, and with that look of latent strength one sees in some animals, but scarred with many a seam, and horny within the fingers—and compared them with those he had nursed into dainty delicacy of whiteness, till Harold could not help saying, "I wouldn't have a lady's fingers."

"I would not have a clown's," said Eustace. "Keep your gloves on, Harold, and do not make them any worse. If you go out to that place to-day, they won't even be as presentable as they are."

"I shall wash them."

"Wash! As if oceans of Eau-de-Cologne would make them fit for society!" said Eustace, with infinite disgust, only equalled by the "Faugh!" with which Harold heard of the perfume. In fact, Eustace was dreadfully afraid the other hunters seen and recognised those shoulders, even under the smock-frock, as plainly as he did, and he had been wretched about it ever since.

"You talk of not wanting to do me harm," he said, "and then you go and grub in such work as any decent labourer would despise."

So miserable was he, that Harold, who never saw the foolery in Eustace that he would have derided in others, yielded to him so far as only to give directions to Bullock for sending down the materials wanted for the pond, and likewise for mending the roof of a cottage where a rheumatic old woman was habitually obliged to sleep under a crazy umbrella.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BIRDS OF ILL OMEN.

NOTHING stands out to me more distinctly, with its pleasures and pains, than the visit to Erymanth Castle—from our arrival in the dark—the lighted hall—the servants meeting us—the Australians' bewilderment at being ushered up to our rooms without a greeting from the host—my lingering to give a last injunction in Eustace's ear, "Now, Eustace, *I won't* have Harold's hair greased; and put as little stuff as you can persuade yourself to do on your pocket-handkerchief"—orders I had kept to the last to make them more emphatic; then dashing after the housekeeper leaving them to work—my great room, where it was a perfect journey from the fire to the toilet-

table — my black lace dress, and the silver ornaments those dear nephews had brought me from London—and in the midst of my hair-doing dear little Viola's running in to me in one of her ecstacies, hugging me, to the detriment of Colman's fabric and her own, and then dancing round and round me in her pretty white cloudy tulle, looped up with snowdrops. The one thing that had been wanting to her was that her dear, darling, delightful Lucy should be at her own ball—her birthday ball; and just as she had despaired, it had all come right, owing to that glorious old giant of ours; and she went off into a series of rapturous little laughs over Dermot's account of her uncle's arrival pick-a-back. It was of no use to look cautious, and sign at Colman; Viola had no notion of restraint; and I was thankful when my dress was complete, and we were left alone, so that I could listen without compunction to the story of Lord Erymanth's arrival at Arked House, and solemn assurance that he had been most hospitably received, and that his own observation and

inquiry had convinced him that Mr. Alison was a highly estimable young man, in spite of all disadvantages, unassuming, well-mannered, and grateful for good advice. Dermot had shown his discernment in making him his friend, and Lucy had, in truth, acted with much courage, as well as good judgment, in remaining with him; "and that so horrified mamma," said Viola, "that she turned me out of the room, so I don't know how they fought it out; but mamma must have given in at last, though she has never said one word to me about it, not even that you were all to be here. What a good thing it is to have a brother! I should never have known but for Dermot. And, do you know, he says that my uncle's pet is the cousin, after all—the deferential fool of a cousin, he says."

"Hush, hush, Viola!"

"I didn't say so—it was Dermot!" said the naughty child, with a little arch pout; "he says it is just like my uncle to be taken with a little worship from—well, he is your nephew, Lucy, so I will be politer than Dermot, who does

rage because he says Mr. Alison has not even sense to see that he is dressed in his cousin's plumes."

"He is very fond of Harold, Viola, and they both of them do it in simplicity; Harold does the things for Eustace, and never even sees that the credit is taken from him. It is what he does it for."

"Then he is a regular stupid old jolly giant," said Viola. "Oh, Lucy, what delicious thing *is* this?"

It was the little flower-pot, in which I had planted a spray of lemon-scented verbena, which Viola had long coveted. I explained how Harold had presided over it as an offering from the Hydriot Company to its youngest shareholder, and her delight was extreme. She said she would keep it for ever in her own room; it was just what she wanted, the prettiest thing she had had — so kind of him; but those great, grand giants never thought anything too little for them. And then she went into one of her despairs. She had prepared a number of Christmas presents for the people about the castle to

whom she had always been like the child of the house, and her maid had forgotten to bring the box she had packed, nor was there any means of getting them, unless she could persuade her brother to send early the next morning.

"Is Dermot staying here?"

"Oh yes—all night; and nobody else, except ourselves and Piggy. Poor Piggy, he moves about in more awful awe of my uncle than ever—and so stiff! I am always expecting to see him bristle!"

There came a message that my lady was ready, and was asking for Miss Tracy to go down with her. Viola fluttered away, and I waited till they should have had time to descend before making my own appearance, finding all the rooms in the cleared state incidental to ball preparations—all the chairs and tables shrunk up to the walls; and even the drawing-room, where the chaperons were to sit, looking some degrees more desolate than the drawing-room of a ladyless house generally does look.

Full in the midst of an immense blue damask

sofa sat Lady Diana, in grey brocade. She was rather a small woman in reality, but dignity made a great deal more of her. Eustace, with a splendid red camellia in his coat, was standing by her, blushing, and she was graciously permitting the presentation of the squirting violet. "Since it was a birthday, and it was a kind attention," &c., but I could see that she did not much like it; and Viola, sitting on the end of the sofa with her eyes downcast, was very evidently much less delighted than encumbered with the fragile china thing.

Lord Erymanth met me, and led me up to his sister, who gave me a cold kiss, and we had a little commonplace talk, during which I could see Viola spring up to Harold, who was standing beside her brother, and the colour rising in his bronzed face at her eager acknowledgments of the flower-pot; after which she applied herself to begging her brother to let his horse and groom go over early the next morning for the Christmas gifts she had left behind, but Dermot did not seem propitious, not liking to trust the man he

had with him with the precious Jack o'Lantern over hills slippery with frost; and Viola, as one properly instructed in the precariousness of equine knees, subsided disappointed; while I had leisure to look up at the two gentlemen standing there, and I must say that Harold looked one of Nature's nobles even beside Dermot, and Dermot a fine, manly fellow even beside Harold, though only reaching to his shoulder.

I was the greatest stranger, and went in to the dining-room with his lordship, which spared me the sight of Eustace's supreme satisfaction in presenting his arm to Lady Diana, after she had carefully paired off Viola with her cousin Piggy—*i.e.*, Pigou St. Glear, the eldest son of the heir-presumptive, a stiff, shy youth in the Erymanth atmosphere, whatever he might be out of it, and not at all happy with Viola, who was wont to tease and laugh at him.

It was a save-trouble dinner, as informal as the St. Glear nature and servants permitted. Lord Erymanth carved, and took care that Harold should not starve, and he was evidently trying to

turn the talk into such a direction as to show his sister what his guests were; but Eustace's tongue was, of course, the ready one, and answered glibly about closed beershops, projected cottages, and the complete drainage of the Alfy—nay, that as to Bullock and Ogden hearing reason, he had only to go over in person and the thing was done; the farmyard was actually set to rights, and no difficulty at all was made as to the further improvements now that the landlord had once shown himself concerned. That was all that was wanting. And the funny part of it was that he actually believed it.

Dermot could not help saying to Harold, "Didn't I see you applying a few practical arguments?"

Harold made a sign with his head, with a deprecatory twinkle in his eye, recollecting how *infra dig* Eustace thought his exploit. The party was too small for more than one conversation, so that when the earl began to relate his experiences of the difficulties of dealing with farmers and cottagers, all had to listen in silence, and I

saw the misery of restless sleepiness produced by the continuous sound of his voice setting in upon Harold, and under it I had to leave him, on my departure with Lady Diana and her daughter, quaking in my satin shoes at the splendid graciousness I saw in preparation for me; but I was kept all the time on the outer surface; Lady Diana did not choose to be intimate enough even to give good advice, so that I was very glad when the carriages were heard and the gentlemen joined us, Harold hastily handing to Viola the squirting violets which she had left behind her on the dining-table, and which he had carefully concealed from Eustace, but, alas! only to have them forgotten again, or, maybe, with a little malice, deposited in the keeping of the brazen satyr on the ante-room chimney-piece.

Dermot had already claimed my first dance, causing a strange thrill of pain, as I missed the glance which always used to regret without forbidding my becoming his partner. Viola was asked in due form by Eustace, and accepted him with alacrity, which he did not know to be due to

her desire to escape from Piggy. Most solicitously did our good old host present Eustace to every one, and it was curious to watch the demeanour of the different classes—the Horsmans mostly cordial, Hippa and Pippa demonstratively so; but the Stympsons held aloof with the stiffest of bows, not one of them but good-natured Captain George Stympson would shake hands even with me, and Miss Avice Stympson, of Lake House, made as if Harold were an object invisible to the naked eye, while the kind old earl was doing his best that he should not feel neglected. Eustace had learnt dancing for that noted ball at Government House, but Harold had disavowed the possibility. He had only danced once in his life, he said, when Dermot pressed him, "and that counted for nothing." To me the pain on the bent brow made it plain that it had been at the poor fellow's wedding.

However, he stood watching, and when at the end of our quadrille Dermot said, "Here lies the hulk of the Great Harry," there was an amused air about him, and at the further question, "Come, Alison, what do you think of our big *corroborées?*"

he deliberately replied, "I never saw such a pretty sight!" And on some leading exclamation from one of us, "It beats the cockatoos on a cornfield; besides, one has got to kill them!"

"Mr. Alison looks at our little diversion in the benevolent spirit of the giant whose daughter brought home ploughman, oxen, and all in her apron for playthings," said Viola, who with Eustace had found her way to us, but we were all divided again, Viola being carried off by some grandee, Eustace having to search for some noble damsel to whom he had been introduced, and I falling to the lot of young Mr. Horsman, a nice person in himself, but unable to surmount the overcrowing of the elder sisters, who called him Baby Jack, and publicly ordered him about. Even at the end of our dance, at the sound of Hippa's authoritative summons, he dropped me suddenly, and I found myself gravitating towards Harold like a sort of chaperon. I was amazed by his observing, "I think I could do it now. Would you try me, Lucy?"

After all, he was but five-and-twenty, and could

hardly look on anything requiring agility or dexterity without attempting it, so I consented, with a renewal of the sensations I remembered when, as a child, I had danced with grown-up men, only with alarm at the responsibility of what Dermot called "the steerage of the Great Harry," since collision with such momentum as ours might soon be would be serious; but I soon found my anxiety groundless; he was too well made and elastic to be clumsy, and had perfect power over his own weight and strength, so that he could dance as lightly and safely as Dermot with his Irish litheness.

"Do you think I might ask Miss Tracy?" he said, in return for my compliments.

"Of course; why not?"

When he did ask, her reply was, "Oh, will you indeed? Thank you." Which *naïveté* actually raised her mother's colour with annoyance. But if she had a rod laid up, Viola did not feel it then; she looked radiant, and though I don't believe three words passed between the partners, that waltz was the glory of the evening to her.

She must have made him take her to the tea-room for some ice, and there it was that, while I was standing with my partner a little way off, we heard Miss Avice Stympson's peculiarly penetrating attempt at a whisper, observing, "Yes, it is melancholy! I thought we were safe here, or I never should have brought my dear little Birdie. . . . What, don't you know? There's no doubt of it—the glaze on the pottery is dead men's bones. They have an arrangement with the hospitals in London, you understand. I can't think how Lord Erymanth can be so deceived. But you see the trick was a perfect success. Yes, the blocking up the railway. A mercy no lives were lost; but that would have been nothing to him after the way he has gone on in Australia.—Oh, Lord Erymanth, I did not know you were there."

"And as I could not avoid overhearing you," said that old gentleman, "let me remind you that I regard courtesy to the guest as due respect to the host, and that I have good reason to expect that my visitors should have some con-

fidence in my discrimination of the persons I invite them to meet."

Therewith both he and Miss Stympson had become aware of the head that was above them all, and the crimson that dyed the cheeks and brow; while Viola, trembling with passion, and both hands clasped over Harold's arm, exclaimed, in a panting whisper, "Tell them it is a wicked falsehood—tell them it is no such thing!"

"I will speak to your uncle to-morrow. I am obliged to him."

"Everybody heard that, and all who had either feeling or manners knew that no more ought to be said. Only Lord Erymanth made his way to Harold to say, "I am very sorry this has happened."

Harold bent his head with a murmur of thanks, and was moving out of the supper-room, when Dermot hastily laid a hand on him with, "Keep the field, Harry; don't go."

"I'm not going."

"That's right. Face it out before the hags.

Whom shall I introduce you—— There's Birdie Stympson—come."

"No, no; I don't mean to dance again."

"Why not? Beard the harpies like a man. Dancing would refute them all."

"Would it?" gravely said Harold.

Nor could he be persuaded, save once at his host's bidding, but showed no signs of being abashed or distressed, and most of the male Stympsons came and spoke to him. The whole broke up at three, and we repaired to our rooms, conscious that family prayers would take place as the clock struck nine as punctually as if nothing had happened, and that our characters depended on our punctuality. Viola was in time, and so was Eustace; I sneaked in late and ashamed; and the moment the servants had filed out Viola sprang to Eustace with vehement acknowledgments; and it appeared that just before she came down her missing box of gifts had been brought to her room, and she was told that Mr. Alison had sent for them. Eustace smirked, and Lady Diana apologised for her little

daughter's giddy, exaggerated expressions, by which she had given far more trouble than she ever intended.

"No trouble," said Eustace. "Harold always wants to work off his steam."

"What, it was he?" said Viola.

"Yes, of course; he always does those things," said Eustace, speaking with a tone of proprietorship, as if Harold had been a splendid self-acting steam-engine. "I am very glad to have gratified you, Miss Tracy——"

"Only he did, and not you," said Viola, boldly, luckily without being heard by her mother, while Eustace murmured out, rather bewildered, "It is all the same."

Viola evidently did not think so when Harold came in with beads of wet fringing his whiskers, though he had divested himself of the chief evidences of the rivers of muddy lane through which he had walked to Arked House, full four miles off.

Viola's profuse thanks were crossed by Lady Diana's curt apologies; and as poor Piggy, who

had genuinely overslept himself, entered with his apologies—poor fellow—in a voice very much as if he was trying to say "Grumph, grumph," while he could only say "Wee, wee," they were received solemnly by his uncle with, "The antipodes are a rebuke to you, Pigou. I am afraid the young men of this hemisphere have no disposition to emulate either such chivalrous attentions or exertions as have been Mr. Harold Alison's excuse."

When so much was said about it, Harold probably wished he had let the whole matter alone, and was thankful to be allowed to sit down in peace to his well-earned breakfast, which was finished before Dermot lounged in—not waited for by his uncle, who offered an exhibition of his model-farm-buildings, machines, cattle, &c. Fain would Viola and I have gone in the train of the gentlemen, but the weather, though not bad enough to daunt a tolerably hardy man, was too damp or me, and we had to sit down to our work in the drawing-room, while Piggy, always happier without his great-uncle, meandered about until Lady Diana ordered off Viola to play at billiards

with him, but kept me, for, as I perceived, the awful moment was come, and the only consolation was that it might be an opportunity of pleading Harold's cause.

With great censure of the Stympsons' ill-breeding and discourtesy to her brother (which seemed to affect her far more than the direct injury to Harold), and strong disclaimers of belief in them, still my mother's old friend must inquire into the character of these young men and my position with regard to them. If she had been tender instead of inquisitorial, I should have answered far more freely, and most likely the air of defiance and defence into which she nettled me had a partisan look; but it was impossible not to remember that Miss Woolmer had always said that, however she might censure the scandal of the Stympsons, they only required to dish it up with sauce piquant to make her enjoy it heartily.

And really and truly it did seem as if there was nothing in the whole lives of those poor youths on which those women had not contrived to cast some horrid stain; working backwards

from the dead men's bones in the pottery (Dermot had told her they used nothing but live men's bones), through imputations on Mr. George Yolland's character, and the cause of the catastrophe at the "Dragon's Head;" stories of my associating with all the low, undesirable friends they picked up at Mycening, or in the hunting-field; and as to the Australian part of the history, she would hardly mention to me all she had heard, even to have it confuted.

I was not sure how far she did believe my assurances, or thought me deceived, when I strenuously denied all evil intent from Harold towards his poor wife, and explained that he had merely driven over a precipice in the dark, and had a brain fever afterwards; all I could see was that, though not perfectly satisfied or convinced, she found that her brother would not allow the separation to be kept up, and therefore she resumed her favourite office of adviser. She examined me on the religious habits of my nephews and niece, impressing on me that it was for the sake of the latter that my presence at

Arghouse was excusable; but insisting that it was incumbent on me to provide her with an elderly governess, both for her sake and my own. I was much afraid of having the governess at once thrust upon me; but, luckily, she did not happen to have one of a chaperon kind of age on her list, so she contented herself with much advice on what I was teaching Dora, so that perhaps I grew restive and was disposed to think it no concern of hers, nor did I tell her that much of the direction of Dora's lessons was with a view to Harold; but she could not have been wholly displeased, since she ended by telling me that mine was a vast opportunity, and that the propriety of my residence at Arghouse entirely depended on the influence I exerted, since any acquiescence in lax and irreligious habits would render my stay hurtful to all parties. She worried me into an inclination to drop all my poor little endeavours, since certainly to have tried to follow out all the details of her counsel would have alienated all three at once.

Never was I more glad than when the luncheon-

bell put a stop to the conversation, and the sun struggling out dispensed me from further endurance, and set me free to go with Viola to bestow her gifts, disposing on the way of the overflow of talk that had been pent up for months past. In the twilight, near the lodge of a favourite old nurse of Dermot's, we encountered all the younger gentlemen, and not only did Viola drag her brother in but Harold also, to show to whom was owing the arrival of her wonderful tea-pot cozy.

The good woman was just going to make her tea. Viola insisted on showing the use of her cozy, and making everybody stay to nurse's impromptu kettledrum, and herself put in the pinches of tea. Dermot chaffed all and sundry; Viola bustled about; Harold sat on the dresser, with his blue eyes gleaming in the firelight with silent amusement and perfect satisfaction, the cat sitting on his shoulder; and nurse, who was firmly persuaded that he had rescued her dear Master Dermot from the fangs of the lion, was delighted to do her best for his entertainment. Viola insisted on displaying

all the curiosities—the puzzle-cup that could not be used, the horrid frog that sprang to your lips in the tankard, the rolling-pin covered with sentimental poetry, and her extraordinary French pictures on the walls. Dermot kept us full of merriment, and we laughed on till the sound of the dressing-bell sent us racing up to the castle in joyous guilt. That kettledrum at the lodge is one of the brightest spots in my memory.

We were very merry all the evening in a suppressed way over the piano, Viola, Dermot, and I singing, Harold looking on, and Eustace being left a willing victim to the good counsel lavished by my lord and my lady, who advised him nearly out of his senses and into their own best graces.

But we had not yet done with the amenities of the Stympsons. The morning's post brought letters to Lady Diana and Lord Erymanth, which were swallowed by the lady with only a flush on her brow, but which provoked from the gentleman a sharp interjection.

"Scandalous, libellous hags!"

"The *rara Avis?*" inquired Dermot.

And in spite of Lady Diana's warning, "Not now," Lord Erymanth declared, "*Avice*, yes! A bird whose quills are quills of iron dipped in venom, and her beak a brazen one, distilling gall on all around. I shall inform her that she has made herself liable to an action for libel. A very fit lesson to her."

"What steps shall I take, my lord?" said Eustace, with much importance. "I shall be most happy to be guided by you."

"It is not you," said Lord Erymanth.

"Oh! if it is only *he*, it does not signify so much."

"Certainly not," observed Dermot. "What sinks some floats others."

Lady Diana here succeeded in hushing up the subject, Harold having said nothing all the time; but, after we broke up from breakfast, I had a private view of Lady Diana's letter, which was spiteful beyond description as far as we were concerned; making all manner of accusations on the authority of the Australian relations; the old

stories exaggerated into horrible blackness, besides others for which I could by no means account. Gambling among the gold-diggers, horrid frays in Victoria, and even cattle-stealing, were so impossible in a man who had always been a rich sheep farmer, that I laughed; yet they were told by the cousins with strange circumstantiality. Then came later tales—about our ways at Arghouse—all as a warning against permitting any intercourse of the sweet child's, which might be abused. Lady Diana was angered and vexed, but she was not a woman who rose above the opinion of the world. Her daughter, Di Enderby, was a friend of Birdie Stympson, and would be shocked; and she actually told me that I must perceive that, while such things were said, it was not possible—for her own Viola's sake—to keep up the intimacy she would have wished.

For my part it seemed to me that, in Lady Diana's position, unjust accusations against a poor young girl were the very reason for befriending her openly; but her ladyship spoke in a grand, authoritative, regretful way, and habitual sub-

mission prevented me from making any protest beyond saying coldly, "I am very sorry, but I cannot give up my nephews."

Viola was not present. It was supposed to be so shocking that she could know nothing about it, but she flew into my room and raged like a little fury at the cruel wickedness of the Stympsons in trying to turn everyone's friends against them, and trumping up stories, and mamma giving up as if she believed them. She wished she was Dermot—she wished she was uncle Erymanth—she wished she was anybody, to stand up and do battle with those horrid women!—anybody but a poor little girl, who must obey orders and be separated from her friends. And she cried, and made such violent assurances that I had to soothe and silence her, and remind her of her first duty, &c.

Lord Erymanth was a nobler being than his sister, and had reached up to clap Harold on the shoulder, while declaring that these assertions made no difference to him, and that he did not care the value of a straw for what Avice Stymp-

son might say, though Harold had no defence but his own denial of half the stories, and was forced to own that there was truth in some of the others. He was deeply wounded. "Why cannot the women let us keep our friends?" he said, as I found him in the great hall.

"It is very hard," I said, with grief and anger.

"Very hard on the innocent," he answered.

Then I saw he was preparing to set off to walk home, twelve miles, and remonstrated, since Lake Valley would probably be flooded.

"I must," he said; "I must work it out with myself, whether I do Eustace most harm or good by staying here."

And off he went, with the long swift stride that was his way of walking off vexation. I did not see him again till I was going up to dress, when I found him just inside the front door, struggling to get off his boots, which were perfectly sodden; while his whole dress, nay, even his hair and beard, was soaked and drenched, so that I taxed him with having been in the water.

"Yes, I went in after a dog," he said, and

as he gave a shiver, and had just pulled off his second boot, I asked no more questions, but hunted him upstairs to put on dry clothes without loss of time; and when we met at dinner, Eustace was so full of our doings at the castle, and Dora of hers with Miss Woolmer, that his bath was entirely driven out of my head.

But the next day, as I was preparing for my afternoon's walk, the unwonted sound of our door-bell was heard. "Is our introduction working already?" thought I, little expecting the announcement—"The Misses Stympson."

However, there were Stympsons and Stympsons, so that even this did not prepare me for being rushed at by all three from Lake House—two aunts and one niece—Avice, Henny, and Birdie, with "How is he?" "Where is he? He would not take anything. I hope he went to bed and had something hot." "Is he in the house? No cold, I hope. We have brought the poor dear fellow for him to see. He seems in pain to-day; we thought he would see him."

At last I got in a question edgeways as to the

antecedents, as the trio kept on answering one another in chorus, "Poor dear Nep—your cousin—nephew, I mean—the bravest——"

Then it flashed on me. "Do you mean that it was for your dog that Harold went into the water yesterday?"

"Oh, the bravest, most generous, the most forgiving. So tender-handed! It must be all a calumny. I wish we had never believed it. He could never lift a hand against anyone. We will contradict all rumours. Report is so scandalous. Is he within?"

Harold had been at the Hydriot works ever since breakfast, but on my first question the chorus struck up again, and I might well quail at the story. "Lake Mill; you know the place, Miss Alison?"

Indeed I did. The lake, otherwise quiet to sluggishness, here was fed by the rapid little stream, and at the junction was a great mill, into which the water was guided by a sharp descent, which made it sweep down with tremendous force, and, as I had seen from the train, the river

was swelled by the thaw and spread far beyond its banks. "The mill-race!" I cried in horror.

"Just observe. Dear Nep has such a passion for the water, and Birdie thoughtlessly threw a stick some way above the weir. I never shall forget what I felt when I saw him carried along. He struggled with his white paws, and moaned to us, but we could do nothing, and we thought to have seen him dashed to pieces before our eyes, when, somehow, his own struggles I fancy—he is so sagacious—brought him up in a lot of weeds and stuff against the post of the flood-gates, and that checked him. But we saw it could not last, and his strength was exhausted. Poor Birdie rushed down to beg them to stop the mill, but that could never have been done in time, and the dear dog was on the point of being sucked in by the ruthless stream, moaning and looking appealingly to us for help, when, behold! that superb figure, like some divinity descending, was with us, and with one brief inquiry he was in the water. We called out to him that the current was frightfully strong—we knew a man's

life ought not to be perilled; but he just smiled, took up the great pole that lay near, and waded in. I cannot describe the horror of seeing him breasting that stream, expecting, as we did, to see him borne down by it into the wheel. The miller shouted to him that it was madness, but he kept his footing like a rock. He reached the place where the poor dog was, and the fury of the stream was a little broken by the post, took up poor Nep and put him over his shoulder. Nep was so good—lay like a lamb—while Mr. Alison fought his way back, and it was harder still, being upwards. The miller and his men came out and cheered, thinking at least he would come out spent and want help; but no, he came out only panting a little, put down the dog, and when it moaned and seemed hurt he felt it all over so tenderly, found its leg was broken, took it into the miller's kitchen, and set it like any surgeon. He would take nothing but a cup of tea, whatever they said, and would not change his clothes—indeed, the miller is a small man, so I don't see how he could—but I hope he

took no harm. He walked away before we could thank him. But, oh dear! what a wicked thing scandal is! I will never believe anything report says again."

To the end of their days the Misses Stympson believed that it was the convenient impersonal Rumour which had maligned Harold—not themselves.

I was just parting with them when Harold appeared, and they surrounded him, with an inextricable confusion of thanks—hopes that he had not caught cold, and entreaties that he would look at his patient, whom they had brought on the back seat of the barouche to have his leg examined. Harold said that his was self-taught surgery, but was assured that the dog would bear it better from him than any one, and could not but consent.

I noticed, however, that when he had to touch the great black Newfoundland dog, a strong shudder ran through his whole frame, and he had to put a strong force on himself, though he spoke to it kindly, and it wagged its tail, and showed

all the grateful, wistful affection of its kind, as he attended to it with a tender skill in which his former distaste was lost; and the party drove away entreating him to come and renew the treatment on the Monday, and asking us all to luncheon, but not receiving a distinct answer in Eustace's absence, for he was very tenacious of his rights as master of the house.

I was quite touched with the dog's parting caress to his preserver. "So you have conquered the birds with iron quills!" I cried, triumphantly.

"Who were they?" asked Harold, astonished.

"Surely you know them? I never thought of introducing you."

"You don't mean that they were those women?"

"Of course they were. I thought you knew you were performing an act of heroic forgiveness."

Harold's unfailing politeness towards me hindered him from saying "heroic fiddlesticks," but he could not suppress a "Faugh!" which meant as much, and that mortified me considerably.

"Come now, Harry," I said, "you don't

mean that you would not have done it if you had known?"

"I should not have let the poor beast drown because his mistresses were spiteful hags." And there was a look on his face that made me cry out in pain, "Don't, Harry!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't be unforgiving. Say you forgive them."

"I can't. I could as soon pardon Smith."

"But you ought to pardon both. It would be generous. It would be Christian."

I was sorry I had said that, for he looked contemptuously and said, "So they teach you. I call it weakness."

"Oh, Harry! dear Harry, no! The highest strength!"

"I don't understand that kind of talk," he said. "You don't know what that Smith is to my poor mother!"

"We won't talk of him; but, indeed, the Misses Stympson are grateful to you, and are sorry. Won't you go to them on Monday?"

"No! I don't like scandal-mongers."

"But you have quite conquered them."

"What do you mean? If we are the brutes they tell those who would have been our friends, we are not less so because I pulled a dog out of the river."

The hard look was on his face, and to my faint plea, "The poor dog!"

"The dog will do very well." He went decisively out of the way of further persuasions, and when a formal note of invitation arrived, he said Eustace and I might go, but he should not. He had something to do at the potteries; and as to the dog, the less it was meddled with the better.

"I know you hate black dogs," said Eustace; "I only wonder you ever touched it."

Harold's brow lowered at this, and afterwards I asked Eustace to account for the strange dislike. He told me that the dogs at the store had run yelping after the buggy on that fatal drive, and this and the melancholy howl of the dingoes had always been supposed to be the cause

of the special form of delirious fancy that had haunted Harold during the illness following—that he was pursued and dragged down by a pack of black hounds, and that the idea had so far followed him that he still had a sort of alienation from dogs, though he subdued it with a high hand.

He would still not go with us to Lake House, for go we did. An invitation was stimulating to Eustace, and though I much disliked the women, I knew we could not afford to reject an advance if we were not to continue out of humanity's reach.

So I went, and we were made much of in spite of the disappointment.

Had not Mr. Harold Alison been so kind as to come over both Sunday and Monday morning and see to poor Nep in his kennel before they were down? Oh, yes, they had heard of it from the stable-boy, and had charged him to take care the gentleman came in to breakfast, but he could not persuade him. Such a pity he was too busy to come to-day!

Eustace gave learned and elaborate opinions on Nep, and gained the hearts of the ladies, who thenceforth proclaimed that Mr. Alison was a wonderfully finished gentleman, considering his opportunities; but Mr. Harold was at the best a rough diamond, so that once more his conquest had been for Eustace rather than for himself. They showed me, in self-justification, letters from their relations in Melbourne, speaking of the notorious Harry Alison as a huge bearded ruffian, and telling horrid stories of his excesses in no measured terms. Of course we denied them, and represented that some other man must have borne the same name, and gratitude made them agree; but the imputation lay there, ready to revive at any time. And there had been something in the whole affair that had not a happy effect on Harold. He was more blunt, more gruff, less tolerant or ready to be pleased; Eustace's folly was no longer incapable of provoking him; and even his gentleness towards Dora and me was with a greater effort, and he was plainly in an irritable state of suppressed suffering of mind or temper, which

only the strong force he put upon himself kept in check. My poor Harold, would he see that there were moral achievements higher than his physical ones, and would he learn that even his strength was not equal to them, unaided?

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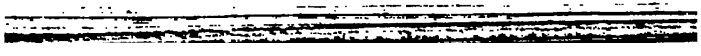

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